

**WAITING FOR THE INEVITABLE:  
SOCIAL PROCESSES PRECEDING A MERGER IN THE  
NEW ZEALAND TERTIARY SECTOR**

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important people are in any change process.

## **Abstract**

This study investigates the social dynamics of a pre-merger process between two tertiary education organisations in Christchurch, New Zealand. An emic/ insider research approach was used as the author was an employee of one of the merging organisations. Primary data was collected through personal observations and unstructured and semi-structured interviews with thirty merger participants consisting of, general and academic staff, management, and one student. Secondary data sources included existing merger literature, organisational communication and change policies, and press articles.

The study focused on four aspects of social dynamics: i) use of language, ii) expression of emotions, iii) meaning making, and iv) exit behaviour. The use of language depicted the merger as a battle that felt like a war-zone, while humour was used as a prop and revealed sub-text of negative emotions. Expression of emotions portrayed the intensity of feeling, acted as a lens to process meaning, and heightened the organisational atmosphere. Recipients of the merger such as, staff attributed different meanings to the change than those in charge of the merger did such as, management, which impacted relationships, self-confidence, career direction, and provoked self-assessment. Overall, staff felt excluded from the merger process and as a result exercised a range of exit behaviours including escapism, withholding of effort, disengagement, and defiance.

This study suggests that minimising dysfunctional exit behaviour can be achieved through inclusive communication processes, transparent decision-making, and acknowledgement and management of emotions. An inclusive merger structure should provide mechanisms for staff to express emotions as well as integrate roles that enable what is important to staff to be built into the process. Additionally, as mergers are likely to be contested processes, management skill is required to defuse stress and tension, and to resolve conflicts.

## Glossary

I use the following terms in this study. To prevent ambiguities their meanings are clarified below.

**Social Dynamics.** Encompass “[t]he pattern, change, development and driving forces of a human group, community, or society” (GEMET Thesaurus, retrieved 27 March, 2006). For this study, social dynamics is defined as use of language, expression of emotions, meaning making, and behaviour of the merger community.

**Pre-merger Phase.** For the purpose of this study, pre-merger refers to the period from when the merger was announced to staff in late January 2005 until the merger legally occurred on January 1, 2007.

**Merger Process.** Throughout this study I refer to the merger process, which involves processes that occurred prior to the official merger date of January 1, 2007. Effectively, the merger process period referred to in this study is the *pre-merger phase* as defined above.

**Management.** These are participants that have merger decision-making powers. Directors of departments/Schools were not classified as management participants unless they had an organisational level influence on merger outcomes. Hence, management participants are typically members of the senior management executive teams.

**Tertiary Education/Higher Education.** Post-high school education including undergraduate certificates, diplomas and degrees, and graduate and post-graduate qualifications.



# **1 Chapter One: Introduction**

## *1.1 Research Goals*

“I want to live where people can see beyond the figures to embrace complex truth” -

David Boyle (Boyle, 2000, p. vii).

This study aims to investigate social dynamics generated in the pre-merger stages of the merger between the Christchurch College of Education (CCE) and the University of Canterbury (UC), through which I seek to understand the social aspects of mergers. The study employs participant observations and interviews as sources of primary data collection.

To progress this study aim the following research goals were devised:

1. Discover the similarities and differences in management and staff perceptions of the merger process.
2. Establish the importance of social dynamics in this merger.
3. Determine merger communication processes.
4. Identify the role of emotions in the merger process.
5. Discern behaviour attributed to the merger process.

To achieve these research goals it was necessary staff from all levels of the institutions contributed, giving a voice to those considered less powerful or marginalised such as, non-decision makers (Martin, 2002). And, as lives are formed through actions, decisions, and the act of telling (Martin, 2002); this story is told using three key sources. First, interviews with 30 individuals from UC and CCE management, academic staff, general staff, and a student, provide a picture of the merger social landscape. Second, reflexivity is woven into the story based on my experiences as a merger participant at CCE. Third, participant observation adds context to participants' discussions.

## *1.2 Colleges of Education Live On Via Mergers*

I will now briefly review the background of this merger to make “abstractions concrete by locating them in particular contexts” (Sherman, 2005, p. 133). Colleges of Education had, in a sense, been on probation in recent years. There were initial trials across the

entire tertiary education sector that included: competition for students (Harman & Harman, 2003); introduction of a compulsory tuition fees maximum that prevented institutions from increasing their income via fee levels; and a buoyant job market (CDC, 2004; Department of Labour, 2003), which reduced the nationwide pool of students.

In addition to these market considerations, evidence of shifting government policy towards tertiary education rationalisation continued to mount. In September 2005 the government announced it would “ensure teacher education was provided by people actively involved in research,” which was reported as a “danger signal for some teacher education providers” (Gerritsen, 2005, p. 5) that did not emphasise research. On the 8 December 2005 the Association of Colleges of Education in New Zealand (ACENZ), the representative body for Colleges of Education, announced it would close effective 31 December 2005 (McMahon, 2005). This closure also included the Colleges of Education Accreditation Committee (CEAC), which meant Colleges no longer had delegated authority from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) or autonomy to approve and accredit courses. The government-funded Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) was also introduced, resulting in a public measure for higher education institutions based on research. Unfortunately, Colleges of Education did not rank highly in PBRF scores with individual Colleges receiving between 0.02-0.12 percent of total 2004 PBRF allocated funding (Tertiary Education Commission, 2004). Then in early 2005, the New Zealand Prime Minister signalled a return to a two-tiered education system (Espiner, 2005) consisting of Universities and Polytechnics.

Given these warning signs, and perhaps in order to survive, four Colleges of Education elected to merge with Universities prior to 2005. Only Colleges in Christchurch and Dunedin remained. On 23 February 2005, CCE and UC agreed to hold formal discussions about a possible merger. Their decision to enter into detailed discussions followed an earlier CCE Council resolution to seek a merger with a university, nominating UC as their preferred partner. On January 1, 2007 UC and CCE officially merged.

### *1.3 Why Merge UC and CCE?*

Pre-merger UC's organisational identity was strongly linked to scholarly research, which differed from CCE's vocational history that focused on a practitioner education model (Brown, 2005). An example of these different identities is that university teachers believed their primary role to be a researcher, whereas college teachers emphasised teaching rather than research. The central classroom focus in a university context acts to stimulate student interest, yet the focus at Colleges is on the needs of the learner (Gilbert & Cameron, 2002). Given their differing organisational identities, you might wonder why UC and CCE chose to merge.

UC and CCE have been closely aligned for some time with joint qualification programmes and credit transfer arrangements. The two institutions are also physically located in close proximity to each other. And, they share infrastructure since the integration of the "printery" and "facilities management" services in 2003 and 2004 respectively.

UC was founded in 1873 and, in 2005 with 12,600 equivalent full-time students (EFTS) (University of Canterbury, 2005) was more than four times larger than CCE, which was founded only four years later, and in 2005 had just over 3000 EFTS (Christchurch College of Education, 2005). This merger meant an EFTS increase of approximately 20% for UC and is the largest College-University merger to occur in New Zealand. Justification of this merger centred on New Zealand and overseas trends for teacher education to be undertaken within a university setting in line with other professions such as, medicine, law, and engineering (University of Canterbury, 2005). It was also widely accepted that CCE's difficult financial position contributed to the decision to seek a merger partner (Brown, 2005). Throughout the pre-merger period, CCE was also being restructured. To management the merger and restructure were distinct processes but to staff they were indeterminate from each other (Brown, 2005).

### *1.4 Study Justification*

With a history dating back to 1897 (Gaughan, 2002) mergers have become part of the business and social landscape. Globally, over the past three decades, mergers have been used in public higher education sectors to address a range of issues including:

fragmentation amongst non-university institutions; lack of financial and academic viability; low efficiency and quality; and external threats (Harman & Harman, 2003).

New Zealand used to boast six Colleges of Education. This number had shrunk to two Colleges by 2005, and by January 2007, none remained. Colleges of Education in Palmerston North, Hamilton, Auckland, and Wellington merged respectively with Massey University, Waikato University, the University of Auckland, and Victoria University of Wellington. And in 2007, CCE and UC merged, as did the Dunedin College of Education and the University of Otago. As all Colleges of Education were amalgamating with Universities, this sector was ripe for merger research.

The distinctiveness of this study lies in it being conducted during the pre-merger phase, prior to the official merger date of January 1, 2007. Research at this stage of the merger process has been limited, as Marks and Mirvis (2001) found often “researchers can not identify research sites before the merger occurs” (p. 81). Therefore, I seized this research opportunity presented by being in the right place at the right time as a CCE employee during the pre-merger period.

### *1.5 Merger Participant, Researcher, and Author*

I share a little about myself in this section in the interests of disclosure and to empower you, the reader, to objectively assess this study as you read. I also draw on reflexivity throughout this thesis to discuss my own cognitive and emotional responses to the merger.

I joined CCE’s School of Business in 2002 after graduating as their 2001 top Bachelor of Business Management (BBusMgt) student. As a merger participant, I was exposed to and personally affected by the merger from the staff announcement of a potential amalgamation in January 2005, until September 2006 when my position was disestablished in a change proposal. As I explained on my voluntary redundancy form, disestablishment for me was a “negative message of my value as a staff member [and ...] very distressing.” I further clarified on the form that I saw leaving CCE as a “positive step towards gaining some control over my future.” Within a short time I secured an exciting position, outside the education sector that was an excellent match to

my skills. However, during the merger, as a general staff member at the smaller of the two merging parties, I felt my job security and career were profoundly affected by the merger process.

As the researcher, I am the architect of this study. Under the guidance of my supervisor I chose the topic, data collection methods, and potential participants. I believe I saw more than one point of view throughout the merger process as participants' entrusted their personal experiences to me. This led, on occasion to me feeling I had a more complete picture of pre-merger processes than other staff who did not have access to a range of management, academic, and general employees' feelings and experiences.

Wearing my researcher hat also gave me a reason, it reminded me, to constantly take a step back and try to look objectively at situations for: misinterpretation; mixed or confusing signals during interactions; catalysts for behaviour; to try and put myself in someone else's shoes; and overall to extract meaning. I do not claim to have always achieved objectivity, most obviously because I was personally affected by the merger while conducting this research, but also because it was difficult to remain objective during a rush of empathy for people affected by the merger. For example, I watched a colleague cry after a skit was performed that attempted to depict the satirical nature of the merger by enacting the process that culminated in the closure of the School of Business. I knew there must be a non-wounding way to see this skit but at the time it was difficult to be objective and identify what that might be.

Now, as author of this thesis, I am faced with a new challenge. How to articulate pre-merger social processes in an engaging and honest manner that gives participants the voice they deserve. It was also demanding to re-live the merger vicariously through the act of telling because it revived emotions in me similar to what I experienced during the merger. Yet throughout this research journey I have attempted to follow Burrhus Skinner's (1981) advice and discover what I *have* to say.

Mergers are not just about figures, monetary benefits, cost savings, economies of scale, sector rationalisation, or company strategy. There is also a human/social side, which adds complexity to merger processes and impacts on outcomes. Especially as attitudes towards turnover intention, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction often

decline with organisational restructuring (Allen, Freeman, Reizenstein, & Rentz, 1995). It is the social side that, I believe, illuminates the truth of a merger more saliently than numerical reporting of projected profits, cost-savings, and staff rationalisation. Like Boyle, I want to discover complex truth beyond figures. Hence, this study aims to “capture organisational experiences showing the complexity, conflict, uncertainty, and instability that exist” (Martin, 2002, p.9).

This is not a study attempting to provide a realist, impartial, “objective” management and staff account of the merger between UC and CCE. Instead, I tell a tale of social processes in an unfolding merger for in the words of Robert McKee, “a story isn’t a flight from reality but a vehicle that carries us on our search for reality, our best effort to make sense out of the reality of existence” (Boyle, 2004, p. 123).

However, I did feel a vague sense of unease about embarking on this tale: would people participate openly?, would I be too emotionally involved? This unease was reinforced by colleagues referring to my research topic as “career limiting.” Yet career limiting or not, I did undertake this research. And while sharing it I hope to establish rapport with you, the reader, whilst also providing a vivid account of unique merger events through the style of an impressionist tale, where the author can be an actor and you feel you are close to the action (Martin, 2002).

### *1.6 Merger Timeline*

“People don’t know what their futures are and it was January 2005 when the senior executive team first discussed the merger and put their shoulder to the wheel, so to speak, and here we are in August [2006] and still people don’t know where they’re going to be.”

This management participant’s quote highlights the length of the merger process, which left many staff with no certainty about their future even after one year and eight months. To illustrate the events of the merger process I have compiled a timeline using secondary data that included: communications from merger project managers, senior management, and human resources department; my experience; organisational documents; and media reports. The timeline’s purpose is to provide context in which to

view this merger tale by offering a high level view. It is not a detailed dateline of every merger-related decision or event for I confess I did not have access to every decision, document, or event. A more comprehensive merger timeline is provided in the Appendix A.

Yet, as it is appropriate to equip you the reader with a perspective on the duration of the merger process, key events are summarised in Table 1.1. When preparing the timeline I was struck by the number of change processes occurring in unison. For example, by the week ending August 11, 2006 there were five separate change proposals in consultation: Financial Services; Adult Education and Training Programmes; School of Business Programmes; Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Related Services; and Enrolments and Records Services.

This convergence of change resulted in a bottleneck of change proposal releases, submission due dates, review panel deadlines, and implementation plan distributions. As the timeline shows, Adult Education and Training Programmes, the School of Business, Enrolments and Records Services, and ICT and Related Services change proposals, were all released within an eight day period 31 July – 7 August 2006. The timeline also shows there were some inconsistencies regarding consultation period durations with change proposal submission periods closing as follows: Enrolments and Records Services on August 21, 2006, two weeks after change proposal release; Information Communication Technology and Related Services on August 29, 2006, four weeks after change proposal release; Adult Education and Training Programmes and the School of Business submissions closing on August 31, 2006, again four weeks after change proposal release. It is worth noting that for three of these change proposals, submissions were due within three days of each other 29-31 August, and that all four were due within a ten day period. This undoubtedly created a bottleneck for staff to prepare submissions if they wished to comment on all four.

Presumably to spread the workload, members of panels reviewing these submissions did differ with the exception of the School of Business and Adult Education and Training Programmes, where one of the three members was on both review panels. However, the Human Resource advisors for all four change proposals were the same two staff. The review panel submission dates to the UC Chief Operating Officer also highlighted some

timing inconsistencies. Information Communication Technology and Related Services recommendations were due September 1, 2006, three days after submissions closed. Enrolments and Records Services recommendations were due on September 7, 2006, 13 days after submissions closed. Adult Education and Training Programmes and the School of Business recommendations were due on September 19, 2006, 12 days after submissions closed.

With such prolific change comes much uncertainty, which can reasonably be expected to affect the atmosphere of UC and CCE and how people felt about the merger. It is therefore relevant to point out that interviews with participants were conducted between July – September 2006, a period that the timeline shows to be turbulent in the merger process with a number of change proposals being released.

Table 1.1: Merger Timeline Summary

| Date                        | Event   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>2005</b>                 |   |
| 9 February 2005             | Christchurch College of Education (CCE) Council passed a resolution to seek a merger with a university and that the preferred university was the University of Canterbury (UC). A suggested merger date was January 1, 2006.  |
| March 2005                  | CCE Council passed a resolution that the School of Business was no longer part of UC/CCE merger. Instead a School sale process is agreed by CCE Principal/ Deloitte/ TEC/ TAMU.   |
| 13 April 2005               | CCE Council motion passed supporting "in principle" the proposed merger with UC and endorsed a proposal that the merger take effect no later than January 1, 2007.  |
| 22 April 2005               | Email notification to CCE staff that a review of operations and structure was about to commence.  |
| Week commencing 15 May 2005 | CCE School of Business Information Memorandum is sent out to would be purchasers. School sale tender process commences.   |
| 1 June 2005                 | UC and CCE Councils resolve to progress merger discussions, effectively approving the merger business case. This case was intended to form the basis of the document to be sent to the Minister for Tertiary Education asking for his approval for the proposed merger. |
| 13 June 2005                | CCE staff advised via email that all College Schools are under review as well as the nature and size of SLG (CCE Strategic Leadership Group).   |



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| 12 August 2005                 | <p>CCE restructure change proposal document released to staff. This document refers to the below CCE leadership positions as disestablished with effective dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Associate Principal (June 2005)</li> <li>- Director: Learning and Information Services (July 2005)</li> <li>- Human Resources Manager (September 2005)</li> <li>- Associate Director: School of Professional Development (December 2005)</li> <li>- Director: School of Business (dependent on sale of the School of Business, January 2006).</li> </ul> |
| 23 September 2005              | Proposed structure for a UC College of Education presented to staff by the Academic Planning Group (APG).   |
| 3 October 2005                 | CCE Restructure change proposal implementation plan published.  |
| Week commencing 3 October 2005 | Catering Department change proposal presented to staff.   |
| 28 October 2005                | Change proposal for the proposed integration of Marketing and Liaison Services released.  |
| 28 October 2005                | Change proposal for the proposed integration of Library Services released.  |
| 16 November 2005               | CCE Council passed a resolution to wind down/close the School of Business through transitional arrangements with UC until 2008.   |
| 5-22 December 2005             | CCE Climate Survey available online for staff to complete.  |
| 8 December 2005                | <p>Notification of closure of ACENZ effective from 31 December 2005. ACENZ was the representative body for the Colleges of Education. This also included the closure of the Colleges of Education Accreditation Committee, CEAC.</p>  |
| <b>2006</b>                    |   |
| 3 February 2006                | CCE Marketing and Liaison functions are now part of UC.   |
| 3 February 2006                | CCE campus library is now the UC Education Library.   |
| Week ending 5 May 2006         | Minister for Tertiary Education announces the commencement of a period of public consultation about the proposed mergers of Christchurch College of Education with the University of Canterbury, and Dunedin College of Education with Otago University.  |
| 9 June 2006                    | Public submission period for proposed mergers to the Minister for Tertiary Education closes.  |
| June/July 2006                 | A further CCE staff climate survey scheduled for June/July 2006 (CCE, 2006) did not take place.   |

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| 25 July 2006   | <p>Change Proposal for the Integration of Financial Services released.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CCE 9 out of 11 positions disestablished and one fixed term position not renewed.</li> <li>- 4 new UC positions intended to be advertised.</li> </ul>   |
| 31 July 2006   | <p>Change Proposal for the Integration of Adult Education and Training Programmes released.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All 3 positions transferred to UC.</li> </ul>  |
| 1 August 2006  | <p>Change Proposal for the Integration of the School of Business Programmes released.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All positions disestablished.</li> <li>- Fixed term lecturer positions intended to be advertised.</li> </ul>   |
| 1 August 2006  | <p>Change Proposal for the Integration and Provision of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Related Services released.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CCE 6 of 11 positions disestablished.</li> <li>- CCE 2 fixed term contract position-types not renewed (which may have affected more than 2 people).</li> <li>- CCE 2 of 9 Educational Design Team positions disestablished.</li> <li>- UC 16 of 46 positions disestablished.</li> <li>- UC 1 fixed term contract position-type not renewed (which may have affected more than 1 person).</li> <li>- UC 0 of 11 Print &amp; Copy positions disestablished.</li> <li>- 29 new UC positions intended to be advertised.</li> </ul> |
| 7 August 2006  | <p>Change Proposal for the Integration of Enrolments and Records Services released.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All positions disestablished.</li> <li>- 12 new UC positions intended to be advertised (3 of these were not full-time, and 2 of these were fixed term).</li> </ul>   |
| 18 August 2006   | <p>The Minister for Tertiary Education announced approval of the merger between the University of Canterbury and the Christchurch College of Education effective on January 1, 2007.</p>  |
| <p>Noon 21 August</p> <p><del>Noon 4 September</del></p> <p>2006 *</p> | <p>Enrolments and Records Services change proposal submissions close. UC Human Resources receive submissions from all interested parties.</p> <p>*On 11 August the 4 September submission date was amended to noon 21 August.</p>   |
| <p>Noon 29 August</p> <p>2006</p>                                      | <p>Information Communication Technology and Related Services change proposal submissions close. UC Human Resources receive submissions from all interested parties.</p>   |
| <p>Noon 31 August</p> <p>2006</p>                                      | <p>School of Business change proposal submissions close. UC Human Resources receive submissions from all interested parties.</p>  |

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|---------------------|--|
| Noon 31 August 2006 | Adult Education and Training Programmes change proposal submissions close. UC Human Resources receive submissions from all interested parties.   |
| 4 September 2006    | Change Proposal for the Establishment of the Staff Structure for the University of Canterbury College of Education (UCCE) released to staff. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 29.7 FTE* positions disestablished out of 177.5 FTE positions.</li> <li>- 28.2 new FTE positions intended to be advertised.</li> </ul> *FTE – Full time equivalent |
| 2 October 2006      | Establishment of the Staff Structure for the University of Canterbury College of Education (UCCE) change proposal submissions close. UC Human Resources receive submissions from all interested parties.   |
| 6 October 2006      | Establishment of the Staff Structure for the UCCE review panel makes recommendations to UC Vice-Chancellor and CCE Principal.  |
| 16 October 2006     | Establishment of the Staff Structure for the UCCE implementation plan released.  |
| <b>2007</b>         |  |
| 1 January 2007      | University of Canterbury and Christchurch College of Education officially merge.   |

### *1.7 Thesis Overview*

Using social dynamics as the vehicle, this thesis is a journey through the pre-merger stages of the UC and CCE amalgamation. This chapter has revealed the form of this study, clarified its nature and purpose, discussed its relevance, introduced the merger partners UC and CCE, and presented a timeline of events to set the merger scene.

Next, extant literature is reviewed in six sections. The first section examines what a merger is and common reasons why they occur. After which the topics of social dynamics, communication, and language employed during change are introduced. A discussion of emotions, and involvement and meaning attributed to mergers then conclude chapter two. The third chapter explains the methodology used in this research. Chapter four presents the exploration of four themes that were uncovered through one-to-one interviews and participant observation: involvement; meaning making; the language of change; and expression of emotions. Chapter five then discusses the use of humour as a merger prop. The final chapter draws conclusions from this study, which aims to capture the social side of pre-merger processes, a story worth telling and an emic research opportunity too good to miss.

## **2 Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### *2.1 Introduction to Literature Review*

This chapter commences by broadly defining mergers and some common reasons they occur. I then review the literature relating to social aspects of mergers, including communication. Discussed next is the language adopted during organisational changes such as mergers, followed by the role of emotions. This review then concludes with a discussion of involvement and meaning in organisational change.

### *2.2 What Are Mergers and Why Do They Occur?*

Although there is no one accepted definition of such a “dynamic process unfolding over time” (Ruhli & Sachs, 1999), it is important to set the scene by reviewing what a merger is understood to be. A merger is a process to “combine into a whole, blend gradually, amalgamate... consolidate, join, unite” (Hawker & Cowley, 1996, p. 314). Harman and Harman (2003) state that a merger is “the combination of two or more separate organisations, with overall management control coming under a single governing body and single chief executive” (p. 30). Regardless of the definition used, mergers are radical organisational change processes that involve the abandoning of existing governance forms, institutional norms, objectives, and academic programmes (Skodvin, 1999). And, being radical change, mergers are also a long-term process that can take up to ten years before the new institution operates as a cohesive whole (Harman & Meek, 2002). Although there is no one universal definition, common to these explanations is the perception that a merger is the formation of a new organisation from existing institutions. The equality implied by the creation of a new organisation prevents a “we versus they attitude and win/lose dynamics” (Mirvis & Marks, 1986, p. 76), which occurs when one side dominates during the transition phase. However, mergers can be either hostile or friendly. The former are referred to as take-overs or acquisitions. Even a friendly merger between two unequal organisations in terms of size can be perceived as an acquisition of the smaller organisation by the larger one.

But not all merger descriptions are dispassionate. Mulvey, in his dissertation, described a merger as an “irreversible totality – the legal death of one or both parties in the creation of a new one” (cited in Skodvin, 1999, p. 68). This violent imagery alludes to

the idea that mergers seldom occur without disruption or significant risk such as: customer loss, competitive attack, loss of key personnel, unproven technology, labour uncertainty, and negative media coverage (Perry & Herd, 2004). Nevertheless, mergers are frequently selected as the preferred change option. Their popularity may be attributed to the belief that they enable growth (McIntyre, 2004) or reduce operational costs by: creating synergies, increasing productivity, or meeting market demands more effectively (Elsass & Veiga, 1994; Lowe, 1998; Millward & Kyriakidou, 2004; Perry & Herd, 2004; Strang, Gleisner, Howlett, & Loth, 2004). Mergers are also employed when an organisation attempts to manage their dependence on the environment by absorbing competition, diversification, or removing reliance on another organisation (Pfeffer, 1972).

Mergers are not a phenomenon confined to the private sector. Globally, Colleges of Education have merged with polytechnics or universities in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (Harman & Harman, 2003; Hay & Fourie, 2002). In the public domain mergers are often driven by government policy or trends (Buchanan, Claydon & Doyle, 1999; Harman & Harman, 2003; Kyvik, 2002, Brown, 2005). The prevalence of mergers suggests they are attractive as a strategy for survival and growth. Yet Skodvin (1999) opposes this idea by highlighting the involuntary nature of educational mergers, “in most countries, mergers have in part been involuntary, in the sense that educational authorities have initiated them” (p. 66). It seems, institutions often have the freedom to choose their preferred merger partner but the merger itself is imposed by a change in education policy or as a reaction to competition (Skodvin, 1999; Pick, 2003; ADB 2003). These circumstances may be setting mergers up to fail given that voluntary mergers are usually more successful than forced mergers, which involve state intervention (Skodvin, 1999).

There are of course internal institutional drivers for mergers as well such as, to improve teaching, research, and study conditions (Kyvik, 2002). Additional internal drivers include: reference to monetary goals such as, financial exigency, or avoiding closure or bankruptcy; achieving administrative economies of scale; saving money; eliminating academic duplication; improving strategic position in the marketplace; and diversifying academic profiles (Skodvin, 1999; Kyvik, 2002; Hay & Fourie, 2002).

### 2.3 *Social Dynamics*

Social dynamics comprise the social aspects of an organisational community. In this study, these include meaning making, use of language, expression of emotions, and behaviour. Social dynamics are important because they reveal people's responses to change and reflect unique organisational histories that make it difficult to understand decisions unless they are in an organisational context (March, 1999). In part due to the differences in decision-making power, it is likely that managers and staff may react quite differently to an acquisition or merger (Mirvis & Marks, 1986).

Focusing on the New Zealand education context, Dalzell (2000) provided a comprehensive case study of the Palmerston North College of Education and Massey University merger. His research generated a principle-based theory that would impact social dynamics and guide organisational change consisting of: trust, timing, vision, valuing, communication, consultation, culture, compromise, commitment, change, and serendipity. Schraeder (2001) found people highly committed to the organisation are more likely to support a merger than people with lower organisation commitment who may resist. Yet even with commitment, it is unlikely a large organisational change effort would not experience significant resistance (Cammock, 2001). The merger objective, extent of change, and timeline affect the quality of people's change experience (Nilakant & Ramnarayan, 2006), and ensuing social dynamics.

Given that mergers constitute radical change by replacing existing structures and people (Nilakant & Ramnarayan, 2006), as well as combining multiple parties, multi-layered interests, and multi-faceted power relationships, they are socially contested processes. Contestation is more likely in takeover than merger situations as a takeover is threatening and can bring a battlefield mentality that fosters strategic combat (Mirvis, 1985). And, although in change contexts emphasis is often placed on the idea of closing the divide between staff and management, in reality there is likely to be resistance, politics, and failure, which means competing narratives or viewpoints exist (Dawson, 2003). Further, the political nature of mergers may lead to social dynamics based on power relationships, which manifest as one organisation's power over the processes and resources of the other. This is often indicated by size, which acts as a parallel to the ability to shape the organisation post-merger or acquisition (Mirvis, 1985).

Social dynamics are also reflected in behaviour. One behavioural response to organisational dissatisfaction is leaving, effectively exiting the organisation (Hirschman, 1970). DiGeorgio (2003) explained employee actions like this are influenced by how they feel about the merger. If they feel good about their situation they will stay and work to their potential. But if they do not feel good about their situation this may manifest as exit behaviour.

Behaviour is not just a manifestation of personal change responses, it can also be a source of unintended awkwardness and conflict for example, faux pas where a member of the organisation says or acts in an inappropriate way (Goffman, 1959). While such social behaviour is typically unintended, on occasion deliberate scenes or conflicts will occur such as, organisational members storming out of meetings. These disruptions affect social dynamics by forcing others close-by to be witnesses or even take sides (Goffman, 1959). In mergers any conflict has repercussions wider than the immediate situation in which it occurs as it detracts from the overall process. Therefore, DiGeorgio (2003) recommends a key competency of leaders during the merger transition phase is skill in negotiating and resolving conflict.

## *2.4 Communication*

In a world where staff distrust and cynicism about leadership is increasingly prevalent (DiGeorgio, 2003), effective communication has the ability to contribute to change success by enabling staff to align their actions to support organisational goals whilst reducing confusion and resistance (Lippitt, 1997). But effective communication requires management commitment, regular monitoring and evaluation, and messages that are consistent with actions and relevant to employees (Kitchen & Daly, 2002). In essence, “constant honest communication about what, why and how changes affect staff is critical” (Behrendt & Klein, 1997, p. 26).

Appelbaum, Gandell, Yortis, Proper and Jobin (2000) agree that constant and lucid communication during a merger is important. For as Richardson and Denton (1996) claim communication can either improve or intensify difficulties associated with change. Ambiguity leads to mistrust (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1987), whereas effective

communication reduces uncertainty through collective planning, and establishes and maintains trust between employer and employee (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998). Therefore, management need to pay attention to communication processes by building communication channels, repeating a focused and simple change message, and by using appropriate methods for dissemination such as, speeches to convey vision (Nilakant & Ramnarayan, 2006).

Although much literature discusses communication techniques to aid merger success, Mirvis and Marks (1986) believe that “merger syndrome” exists, which creates increased centralisation and decreased communication between management and staff. A lack of top-down communication contributes to rumours because staff “become preoccupied with themselves, their incomes, and their careers. Distrust is inevitable” (Applebaum, Gandell, Yortis, Proper & Jobin, 2000, p. 650). Decreased communication can be interpreted by staff as management having something to hide and lead to the generation of worst-case rumours (Marks & Mirvis, 1986). To avoid people relying on informal networks, the grapevine, or rumours that may unintentionally or deliberately distort the change message, Nilakant and Ramnarayan (2006) advocate leaders need to communicate directly with staff via reliable channels. Therefore, it is not wise to delay dealing with employee issues on a one-to-one basis with even though such conversations may be difficult (DiGeorgio, 2003).

The result of an atmosphere of suspicion is likely to be staff scrutinising what management say and do. As Bastien (1987) explained, in a study investigating managers’ reactions to a merger or acquisition, when people are stressed they pay more attention to whether communication is congruent or not. Risberg (1997) also highlighted “no discrepancy between action and words” (p. 258) was desirable; as did Nilakant and Ramnarayan (2006) who advised inconsistent behaviour would erode a leader’s credibility. And, as leaders actions speak louder than words, “consistency between rhetoric and action is absolutely fundamental” (Cammock, 2001, p. 62). Kouzes and Posner (1990) suggested inconsistency between communication messages and leader’s words and deeds indicated a lack of honesty, and Poole (1998) warned that in a change process such inconsistency can cause the change effort to fail and produce confusion and turmoil for people affected by the change.



In addition to consistency, management needs to be aware of how they communicate decisions to organisational members. Clampitt and Williams (2007) contend that the communication of decisions affects acceptance and that a failure to communicate well can indicate a disconnection between the two sides: management and staff. They make the point that decision-makers have weighed evidence, debated explanations, and considered benefits and negatives of alternatives, whereas people not involved in the decision-making process lack knowledge of the alternatives and may find the decision incomprehensible. Disseminating a decision after it has been made, rather than involving staff in the process, makes understanding, accepting, and supporting the decision difficult for those excluded from the process.

Management may desire to shield staff from decisions that create anxiety such as job loss, but staff will pick up on the uncertainties and respond to them (Clampitt & Williams, 2007). A lack of information about the future just intensifies anxiety (Searle & Ball, 2004), and as Nilakant and Ramnarayan (2006) suggest the principle of scarcity makes people desire more of what they lack, which makes sharing scarce strategic information during change processes highly influential.

Another means management and staff use to communicate during a merger is humour. This conveys a rich undercurrent of meaning and should not be regarded as a superficial part of organisational life. People use humour to express deeper views and feelings (Collinson, 2002). And, as Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) warn, humour can also communicate scepticism, disenchantment, disclose the distance between staff and management, and be used as a form of resistance. Collinson (2002) agrees humour can reflect and reinforce workplace tension, conflict, and power relationships. Humour is a method for employees to exercise their voice (Hirschman, 1970) and share dissenting viewpoints.

## *2.5 Language of Change*

Language is central to creating and reflecting organisational reality (Musson & Cohen, 1999). It shapes the way people see the world and is itself shaped by such views, making it a mechanism to maintain and create organisational mindsets (Butcher & Atkinson, 2001). Using a post-modern perspective, organisations can be viewed as

social constructions, where language and discourse play an important part (Nilakant & Ramnarayan, 2006). Language can be described as an instrument of a social system, with voice being language used in context (Bastien, 1992). Hirschman (1970) discussed how the instrument of voice, which is an attempt to improve a situation through communication, can be used to put up a fight when members of organisations perceive few alternatives to resolve an unsatisfactory situation. From a more philosophical viewpoint Whyte (1994), depicted voice as representing, “the urgencies, desires, or emotional strangulation of a soul longing to be heard in the world” (p. 143).

Yet language, or voice, is not the only option available to dissatisfied organisational members, they can also exit by withdrawing from or leaving the organisation (Hirschman, 1970). Rather, voice is the choice to make an effort to change an organisation when it deteriorates. Voice can manifest as individual or collective appeal to management or as protest in an attempt to mobilise public opinion (Hirschman, 1970). When the outcome of voice is uncertain people will weigh up the risk of not being heard. In a merger situation if people believe their feedback, voice, will not have an impact they may be increasingly likely to revert to exit behaviour and abandon voice. However, when people feel loyal to an organisation they are likely to believe improvement can be achieved from within and tend to use voice rather than exit (Hirschman, 1970).

Language can be used in different ways within an organisation and reveal much about how members are feeling. When used to create stories it is powerful, not for its accuracy but for the symbolic meaning about events (Musson & Cohen, 1999). Story-telling is entertaining while masking analogical reasoning (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996). Such symbolism and reasoning represents members’ experiences and contributes to the organisational reality. Stories are also political and can be employed to influence others (Dawson, 2003).

A leader’s rhetorical ability enables them to create meaning to influence and control organisations (Musson & Cohen, 1999). It is such skills that in a change setting, allow language to be used positively to promote a future vision (Butcher & Atkinson, 2001). A vision is deemed essential for any change effort as it enables people to become inspired and encourages people to be enthusiastic about the future (Kouzes & Posner,

1990). Senge's five disciplines for change include the concept of a shared vision so people have a common aspiration, which is a strong force for change (Nilakant & Ramnarayan, 2006). Yet even if management's use of language was influential and created a preferred meaning of events or processes, staff are able to challenge and undermine these based on their interpretations of the situation (Musson & Cohen, 1999). Hirschman warns that as management seek freedom to act they may attempt to weaken the weapon of voice into a mere blowing off steam (1970).

Language can also be brutal and demand attention through arousing emotion (Butcher & Atkinson, 2001). Unexpected or shocking speech such as, comparing merger processes to war, murder, and destruction would be examples of communication that is hard to ignore. As Bastien's (1992) research identified, differences in merger experiences are conveyed through language for example: one organisation referred to the relationship as a merger while the other referred to it as an acquisition; one used more formal written communications but the other almost none; and one institution's members adapted their speech to the dominant merger partner. Language may also change depending on the audience present. Goffman (1959) discusses that favourable terms are used to address people when they are present such as, Mr- or their first name, yet when the individual is not present they are referred to in less flattering ways that may include their surname only or a nickname.

## *2.6 Role of Emotions*

Emotions are a part of daily life and therefore inseparable from work (Perrone & Vickers, 2004). Even seemingly minor hassles or encouragements at work accumulate to affect people's emotional state, which can subsequently affect their behaviour and attitudes in the workplace (Ashkanasy, 2002). So it is inapt "to talk merger and act acquisition" (Marks & Mirvis, 2001, p. 86), as this sets an expectation about the future process that will affect staff perceptions and resultant emotions. Emotions are also driven by a resistance to change but as Isabella (1990) argues, these should be viewed by management as an inherent part of cognitive transition in the change process rather than an obstacle.

Schweiger and Denisi (1991) found that during mergers staff experienced decreased job satisfaction, commitment, and belief in the organisation's trustworthiness, and increased undesirable outcomes such as, stress and uncertainty. These undesirable emotions can be minimised by social support, which Mirvis and Marks (1986) advocate is an important factor in helping people cope with merger stress. Additionally, primary appraisal of the situation is important in affecting staff emotions and subsequent coping strategies used during an acquisition (Scheck & Kinicki, 2000). It matters how people appraise the situation into something they can or can not change (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis & Gruen, 1986). In a merger, institutions organise to be the buyer or the seller, which affects their subsequent mindset. Hence, it is important to try and stand in the other party's shoes to check merger behaviour (Marks & Mirvis, 2001).

In an engaging personal account of job loss as a result of acquisition, Harshbarger (1987) discussed his emotions and reactions. These included stress, shock, the loss of a sacred part of life (his work), and his lack of choice in the change. Negative emotions are felt by management and staff who are the very people expected to create economic value while losing non-economic privileges such as job security, promotions, and status during a merger (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1987).

Risberg (1997) suggests that every person, whether they are management or staff, will feel stress, anxiety, ambiguity, and confusion in a merger or acquisition process. This is because change brings uncertainty through altered routines and uncommon activities. This uncertainty evokes anxiety and stress and erodes staff trust in managers attempting the change (Nilakant & Ramnarayan, 2006). Such uncertainty invites emotional bargaining as people attempt to hold on to the organisation's culture, which manifests in anger, depression, and ambivalence while people withdraw and begin to search for a new career (Mirvis, 1985).

Yet oftentimes staff will hide their emotions, a suppression that can result in an eruption of bottled feelings as well as flowing into non-work areas of life (Perrone & Vickers, 2004). Emotional reactions can also be caused by misunderstandings and cross communications due to cultural differences between the merging organisations (Mirvis, 1985). To avoid anxiety and stress, Langer's suggestions of mindfulness are useful,

these include considering different viewpoints before taking action and paying attention to process over outcome (Nilakant & Ramnarayan, 2006).

## *2.7 Involvement and Meaning*

Participative decision making between staff and management reduces uncertainty and increases understanding of the process as it signals shared power and control (Witt, Andrews & Kacmar, 2000). The chance of obtaining staff buy-in will be improved through their participation in the process. It is accepted that mergers involve difficult decisions such as, disestablishing positions. Yet as Nilakant and Ramnarayan (2006) advise, even hard decisions can be accepted by following four principles that advocate the involvement of staff: i) employing an open, transparent, and inclusive decision-making process, ii) including staff when diagnosing the change, iii) consulting as widely as possible by listening to people, and iv) giving people what they ask for to implement a difficult decision. Additionally, management must pay attention to fairness process elements by demonstrating respect for staff, providing information, and keeping promises (Searle & Ball, 2004).

Soliciting information from staff through tools such as, climate surveys is another form of involvement that can be used to shape the new organisation (McIntyre, 2004). However, regardless of the level of involvement the length of a merger process, if long, may cause change fatigue, which will lead to cynicism, suspicion, and a lack of enthusiasm for future changes (Nilakant & Ramnarayan, 2006).

In a volatile change situation like a merger, the experiences of others provide validation for concerns. Hence, the involvement of staff and the way they are treated in redundancy and retention processes attracts much attention, and if perceived as biased, inconsistent, or inaccurate, leads to distrust in management and causes retained staff to focus on discrepancies rather than positive behaviour (Searle & Ball, 2004).

Process discrepancies also contribute to the meaning staff assign to mergers based on their experiences and emotions. And, given that staff feel attached to their organisation, role, colleagues and careers, many experience a sense of loss during a merger or acquisition (Schweiger, Ivancevich, & Power, 1987). Common concerns that aggravate

loss include: loss of identity, as staff no longer identify with their institution or see career opportunities; shortage of timely and accurate information, which leads to rumours; increasing anxiety, the longer the merger takes to unfold; and the effects on family-life through variable moods and behaviour, with emotions such as, anxiety or reduced self-esteem being brought into the home (Schweiger, Ivancevich, & Power, 1987). Minimising loss involves management commitment and companionship with staff, honesty, empathy, and minimising political behaviour through transparent processes (Schweiger, Ivancevich, & Power, 1987).

## 2.8 *Conclusion*

This review of literature has drawn attention to the prevalence of mergers in education and how these have been influenced by government policy or trends as well as internal institutional drivers such as, financial exigency and improving strategic position in the marketplace. The topic of social dynamics was discussed as comprising the social aspects of an organisational community including: meaning making, use of language, expression of emotions, and behaviour. Social dynamics are important as they capture people's responses to change.

Communication literature has highlighted the role of consistent, relevant, and timely information dissemination. And that language, like humour, is a mechanism for people to share how they feel about the change process. Emotion is inescapable in mergers and exposes an intensity of feeling, which manifests as stress, anxiety, ambiguity, and confusion. Such emotions combined with the level of staff involvement in the process contribute to the meaning attributed to the merger, which often includes loss.

Next, I examine the methodology of this study before embarking on a discussion of primary data findings.

### **3 Chapter Three: Methodology**

#### *3.1 Introduction to Research Design*

This chapter focuses on the research method employed in this study. I discuss the merger timeline followed by the semi-structured and unstructured interview process. Then participant observation and reflexivity are reviewed. Concluding this chapter are ethical considerations and limitations of this study.

#### *3.2 Research Method*

Methodologies of many merger and acquisition studies rely on large samples and discuss averages rather than providing an in-depth view of a single organisation's strategy (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1987). Whereas this study focuses on providing a rich view of social processes, informed by participants. The "use of both ethnography and interviews would shed light on the relation between abstract beliefs and concrete practices and help us theorize the difference between them" (Sherman, 2005, p. 153). Hence, this study utilises primary data sources including: personal interviews with staff, management, and one student of the merging institutions; participant observation; and reflexivity. Secondary data was also employed to achieve the research goals discussed in chapter one and involved reviewing organisational documents such as, change and communication policies.

To bring a study to life, Richardson explains it is necessary to use description, share everyday events, and "write persuasively so the reader experiences being there" (cited in Creswell, 1998, p. 21), which draws on the literary concept of verisimilitude. Acknowledging this my study attempts to make visible the different views of informants, disclose the researcher's contribution to dialogue, and through quotations and interpretations enable many voices to be heard (Martin, 2002). This is also in the spirit of Czarniawska's (1999) collage analogy, to write so the authorship/voice "of different pieces is distinctly attributed" (p. 24). I hope visibility of individual accounts will also enhance your (the reader's) experience by allowing some of the participants' activity, creativity, and human spirit to come through (Willis, 1977).

The research design also aims to empower the reader, through the use of an impressionist narrative style, combined with information about the author, which you (as reader) can use to uncover biases or hidden interests (Martin, 2002). Being a member of the CCE culture affected by the merger and being unfamiliar with cultural practices such as, mass staff disestablishment meant an emic (insider) research approach was used. This is appropriate as I am “trying to understand cultural practices... that may be unfamiliar to the researcher” (Martin, 2002, p. 37).

And, in recognition of critical theorists’ claims that much organisational research represents management interests not those less powerful (Martin, 2002), and Van Maanen’s belief that cultural research should capture the views held by lower-level employees (Martin, 2002), this study is designed to include academic and general staff affected by the merger as well as management driving the merger.

### *3.3 Merger Timeline*

A timeline of relevant merger events was compiled using secondary data such as, communications from merger project managers, senior management, and human resources department; my experience; organisational documents; and media reports. The timeline provides context for this merger tale.

The timeline also illustrates the length of the merger from January 2005 to the official merger date of January 1, 2007, which likely affected how staff felt and responded during the process. Refer the Appendix A for this timeline.

### *3.4 Conducting of Interviews*

Interviews capture the emotional quality of individual reactions to merger processes (Bastien, 1987). They provide a forum for people to share their experiences, in their own words, which assist in uncovering meaning and understanding the world from participants’ perspectives (Kvale, 1996). I selected this primary data collection technique as the best method to obtain detailed accounts from informants (Martin, 2002). The interviews followed a semi-structured or unstructured format, using an interview protocol (refer Appendix B) as a base, designed to inform the research goals. This format was chosen, rather than surveys, because interviews are most valuable when



the interviewer has insider status, as I do being a merger participant, and because they are interactive an attribute surveys lack (Fetterman, 1998). Interviews also enabled individuals to share their merger experiences, including those not specifically prompted for in the protocol, yet ensured each participant provided information relevant to the research goals.

#### *3.4.1 Selection of Participants*

As this study uses an emic approach the selection of participants was based on the subjective criterion of judgement selection, which meant I made a judgement about who would be included in the study (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran, 2001). Judgement sampling is most appropriate when selecting individual cases that are particularly informative from a population (Neuman, 2000). My insider knowledge facilitated identifying UC and CCE staff members best able to provide unique merger experiences.

Considerable time was spent on participant selection to ensure an account of the unfolding merger process would be provided from two perspectives: i) management implementing the merger, and ii) staff affected by the merger. This meant it was necessary to select management participants who were influencing the merger, not just individuals occupying a management position. Both general and academic staff were chosen to collect a variety of views for these two groups faced different merger challenges. Looming in the new merger environment for CCE academic staff was a greater emphasis on research, whereas CCE general staff faced a situation of over-supply because many of their roles were duplicated at UC. One student interview was conducted to illuminate the differing perspectives between management and staff.

Once I had created a list of potential participants, I contacted them via email providing an information sheet (refer Appendix C) and inviting them to participate in my study. At this stage, I assured the potential interviewees of confidentiality and anonymity, as name and position titles are not disclosed in this research, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I also informed them UC Human Ethics Committee approval had been granted for this research. And, in the spirit of Maori tikanga (custom), I attempted to establish a connection when sending the invitation email for example, I mentioned a mutual contact person where possible.

### *3.4.2 Number and Nature of Participants*

Of the 32 people approached, 30 individuals agreed to participate in this study. Two people contacted did not participate. One declined saying they felt awkward talking about the merger with School of Business staff as they believed that School had been through a lot, the other did not respond even after a follow-up email. I believe the 30 individuals that did participate possessed the necessary experience of this merger and occupied diverse roles across both organisations, to create a rich perspective of pre-merger social dynamics.

For a manageable and clear data collection process I considered some type of participant categorisation was necessary. To achieve this I used the School or area where the participant worked, and their contract type of general, management, or academic staff member. Given the size of the institutions, and the time and financial constraints of this study, this research was confined to only those areas affected by a change proposal. These were: the UC School of Education who became part of the new UC College of Education; the CCE School of Business who would be closed after a wind-down transitional period; UC and CCE Student Services, Finance, and IT staff where many roles were duplicated; and UC and CCE management who were the merger decision makers. Therefore, other UC and CCE Schools/areas were excluded from this study.

This categorisation resulted in five UC and four CCE management participants, five general and academic staff at each institution, and one CCE student being selected, as summarised in Table 3.1. Of the 30 total participants, 14 participants were male and 16 were female.

Table 3.1: Nature of Participants

| Category          | Total Participants | UC       |          | CCE      |           |
|-------------------|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Gender            |                    | Male     | Female   | Male     | Female    |
| Senior management | 9                  | 5        | 0        | 2        | 2         |
| Academic staff    | 10                 | 3        | 2        | 2        | 3         |
| General staff     | 10                 | 1        | 4        | 1        | 4         |
| Student           | 1                  |          |          |          | 1         |
| <b>Totals</b>     | <b>30</b>          | <b>9</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>10</b> |

### 3.4.3 Interview Process

Interviews were the major component of data collection, so I will discuss this process in some depth. A few days prior to the interview, I emailed participants reminding them of the agreed time and place. I prepared the night before by reading through the interview protocol questions, testing the dictaphone, and checking that I had necessary interviews materials such as, protocol, paper, pens, and dictaphone battery. Approximately 30 minutes prior to each interview, I recorded my activities that day and how I was feeling for example, nervous, relaxed, well-prepared. I felt these pre-interview notes were important as a technique to clear space in my schedule and focus my mind on the interview as the day's key event. This also ensured I was calm and well-prepared for each participant encounter, rather than rushing from work straight into the interview.

Prior to commencing the interview process, as Yin (1994) recommends, I pre-tested the interview protocol tool because “the pre-test is the occasion for a formal “dress rehearsal,” in which the intended data collection plan is used as faithfully as possible as a final test run” (p. 74). The participant chosen was an academic staff member at CCE School of Business who was similar to other participants in that they were currently experiencing the merger. As subsequent interview protocol changes were minimal, this participant's data has been used in the study. After the pre-test interview I reviewed: question comprehension, question order, length of interview, opening statement, protocol writing space, and my ability to follow the participant and explore a topic they raised that did not conform to specific protocol questions.

Small changes were made to the protocol. These changes included separating questions into two parts and inviting participants to share their feelings more. For example, the question “what types of communication have you participated in or received relating to this merger?” was separated into two questions; one relating to communication you “participate in” and the second to communication you “receive”. The “receive” question was also expanded to ask how the participant “felt” about the communication types they mentioned. One interview question was removed, as it did not inform the study’s research goals, relating to whether the communication that individuals participated in was prepared by them. After the pre-test interview I asked the participant for feedback on the questions and my interview style. They said they felt it was “therapeutic” to participate and that I had been pleasant and had not tried to lead their answers in any particular direction.

All the interviews were conducted between July – September 2006. Each interview was audio-taped and ranged from 30 minutes to two hours and 21 minutes. I took notes during the interview in case the dictaphone recording failed. Interviews were conducted in the participant’s office, my CCE office, or at my home.

The interview process evolved as interviews progressed. Interview questions were asked in a fluid manner rather than a fixed pattern (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), but consistently followed themes being uncovered. I progressively amended the protocol to reflect/explore themes emerging from prior interviews and to tailor it to each participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). For example, I knew a participant had been disciplined for sending an “all CCE” email in connection with a merger related event so I included a question that would provide an opportunity to discuss this.

When interviewed, all participants were asked if they had received a change proposal for their area. I believed this would influence their emotional state as they may or may not have already been personally affected by the merger. The interviews followed a standard format consisting of a greeting, a thank you for participation, building rapport through non-merger related pleasantries, signing of the consent declaration form, conducting the interview, thanking the participant for their time, providing an explanation of future actions such as, emailing them a copy of the interview transcript, and lastly departing (Fetterman, 1998).

After each interview I took up to one hour to reflect before returning to work. I completed field notes about how I felt the interview had gone, how the participant was dressed, interaction details such as, a handshake, seating arrangements, and recorded any ideas or themes that struck me immediately. I also noted any initial response I had to the research aim after each interview (refer Appendix D for field notes structure).

The process of completing the interviews was an emotional experience for me because I was personally affected by the merger and empathised when participants discussed how it felt to be disestablished. Many of the participants were known to me personally, so it was painful to see them upset or hear them share personally raw experiences. There was also an outpouring of emotion from some participants. For example, two participants cried, one resorted to coarse language to express herself, and three others used less severe but still colourful language to emphasise their points. The process was also time-consuming. Preparing and completing field notes prior to the interview, conducting the interview, then reflecting and documenting notes after the interview, meant the process for each interview took between two-three hours to achieve.

### *3.5 Analysis of Interviews*

Providing an understanding of social culture is a worthy goal in its own right (Martin, 2002), so generalising social behaviour in this merger to other organisational contexts is not warranted. Instead, the focus of this research is on bringing pre-merger social processes to life through thematic analysis.

Before analysis could commence, interview recordings in groups of ten were provided for transcribing to a research assistant, who was bound by a confidentiality clause. After receiving each interview transcript, I reviewed it against my interview notes and checked for errors such as, wrongly spelt words or acronyms (e.g. embrace instead of embrace, Edenborough instead of Edinburgh, TAMU, EFTS etc). I also listened to the complete recording of five interviews while reading the applicable transcript to check for accuracy and completeness.

Participants stated at their interview if they preferred to receive a copy of their transcript via email or have a hard copy delivered. Based on their preference, I gradually distributed transcripts to participants between October 2006 and March 2007.

During February and March 2007, I also re-read all the transcripts to refresh the data in my mind prior to commencing coding. To my surprise, reading these made me feel as if I was experiencing the merger process again, even though it had been four months since I left CCE. I felt sadness about the hurt participants expressed, empathy towards their stories, angry that I felt sad about the merger again, confused by the disparity of feelings between some participants, and disillusionment in a merger process that provoked such feelings from me. I was surprised by the intensity of my reaction to the transcripts for, I believed, as time passed I was desensitised and less emotive about the merger process. I also felt touched and honoured that so many people had shared their personal merger experiences with me.

Interestingly, I was not alone in having an emotional response, participants provided comments when responding to their transcript such as, it is “still surprisingly painful to look back on that time,” and it “took me a few weeks before I actually felt ok about reading it [the transcript]. Made me quite sad really.” A third participant said, “I am in a new job and hate it! So life ain’t so sweet. Mind you in reading the interview transcript I think I am slightly more positive than I was when you interviewed me!”

Once the transcripts had been reviewed by participants, they were reformatted as required and imported into QSR N6. QSR N6 is the sixth version of the NUD\*IST product (acronym for Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising). QSR N6 is not only a system to manage and store documents such as, transcripts it is also an index system providing a conceptual tool for data analysis. However, it is the researcher who provides the link between the stored documents and the index of ideas to draw connections (Gahan & Hannibal, 1998). Such a tool enables the researcher to consider the strength of the evidence, rather than just count the number of times text is coded to a node, by reading the node’s text in its interview context (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I also created research memos in QSR N6 when analysing the interviews to record ideas (refer Appendix E).

And, as the reference guide states, it is the researcher who brings their skill, knowledge, and insight, for which QSR N6 provides the tool to use these research abilities effectively (QSR, 2002). In the same way a car doesn't replace the driver but rather improves the quality of the journey, QSR N6 doesn't replace the researcher but provides a tool for interacting with the data that facilitates the research process. Each interview was coded into QSR N6 using nodes to represent an idea/theme. Nodes are simply "containers for ideas" (Richards, 2002, p. 35), which allow a researcher to abstract the data, hence transforming it from individual instances to create understanding and build a theory. Themes I had originally identified after each interview, or when reviewing the transcripts, were added to QSR N6 as nodes, and further categories emerged from the data as I coded. I created mainly free nodes when analysing the first few transcripts. Free nodes meant that I recorded ideas and concepts but did not pre-empt discovery from the data or cloud my perception through specifying early what I would find (Richards, 2002). Yet if a free node represented or fitted within another category or had a logical relationship with a category this was placed in a tree, a hierarchical grouping/catalogue of related nodes. After these initial transcripts were coded, trees emerged so free nodes were used less frequently and were subsequently integrated into trees.

After coding five interviews I reviewed the list of nodes looking for similar ideas that could be combined and emerging themes that should be defined more clearly or split into more detailed nodes. For instance the node dishonesty was split into i) merger versus takeover, ii) reasons for the merger, iii) about SoB future, iv) about management future, and v) job losses. The list of nodes was again reviewed after 20 interviews and again when all 30 interviews had been coded. Nodes with small numbers of text units were discarded unless they provided a unique view on an aspect of social behaviour. The nodes with many text units form the basis of my findings. Table 3.2 provides an overview of the data nodes that contributed to the study's themes. The table is ordered by themes.

After participant interviews were completed, I again reviewed the literature to expand my understanding of how the themes emerging from this merger process fit with existing merger literature and theoretical frameworks. Additional literature topics reviewed included: use of language and exit behaviours.

Table 3.2: Data Nodes that Contributed to Themes

| Themes      | Themes Layer 1             | Nodes Layer 2   | Nodes Layer 1                     | Data Nodes                    |
|-------------|----------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Involvement | Mechanisms for Involvement | Inclusion   | Positive                          | Management Behaviour          |
|             |                            |   | Working With New People           | High Points of Merger         |
|             |                            | Line Mgmt<br>Merger Website<br>Face-to-face   | Official                          | Communication                 |
|             | Consultation               | Pace  | Inform Each Other                 | Different Perspectives        |
|             |                            |   | Imposed/ Lack of Control<br>Shock | Emotion                       |
|             |                            |   | Justify Process                   | Management Behaviour/Negative |
|             |                            |   | Exclusion                         |                               |
|             |                            | Empty Consultation  | Pretence                          |                               |
|             |                            | Open Process<br>Job Losses  | Dishonesty                        |                               |
|             | Staff Behaviour            | Swore<br>Depressed<br>Affects others<br>Cried   | Intensity                         | Emotion                       |
|             |                            | Exercise/ Sleep/ Relax<br>Collegiality<br>See the Positive  | Positive                          | Staff Behaviour               |
|             |                            | Defiance<br>Reduced Effort<br>Reduced Goodwill<br>Distraction<br>Alcohol Coffee<br>Postgraduate Study<br>Social Activities<br>Disengagement | Negative                          |                               |
|             |                            |   | Concern for Others<br>Stress      | Emotion                       |
|             |                            |   | Demise of SoB                     | Low Points of Merger          |
|             |                            | Family & Friends  | Networks                          | Support                       |



| Themes         | Themes Layer 1       | Nodes Layer 2  | Nodes Layer 1   | Data Nodes                    |
|----------------|----------------------|--|---|-------------------------------|
| Meaning Making | Loss                 | UC CCE Commitment (to merger)  | Separate from Each Other  | Different Perspectives        |
|                |                      |  | Loss  | Merger Mean to You            |
|                |                      |  | Loss/ Left job<br>Lose Good People  | Low Points of Merger          |
|                | Change Proposals     | Change Proposal Impact   | Inform Each Other   | Different Perspectives        |
|                |                      | Staff Value/ Change Proposals  | Separate from Each Other  |                               |
|                | Disestablishment     | Staff Value/<br>Disestablishment<br>Staff Morale<br>CCE Being Absorbed Into UC |   |                               |
|                |                      | Empathy  | Positive  | Management Behaviour          |
|                |                      |  | Look For New Job  | Merger Mean to You            |
|                |                      |  | Optimistic  | Emotion                       |
|                |                      |  | Un-empathetic   | Management Behaviour/Negative |
|                | Personal Impact      | SoB Demise   | Inform Each Other   | Different Perspectives        |
|                |                      |  | Self-Assessment<br>Personal Life  | Merger Mean to You            |
|                |                      |  | Relationships Tested  |                               |
|                |                      |  | Concern for Others<br>Insecure<br>Stress  | Emotion                       |
|                |                      |  | CCE Council Meetings  | Low Points of Merger          |
|                | Workload Changes     |  | Increased Workload<br>Lighter Workload<br>Role Has/ Will Change                   | Workload Changes              |
|                |                      |  | A Headache /No Emotion  | Emotion                       |
|                | Positive Opportunity |  | None/ Scoffs<br>Achieving Merger<br>Milestones<br>Creating Architecture/ New Ways | High Points of Merger         |

| Themes             | Themes Layer 1  | Nodes Layer 2  | Nodes Layer 1                                   | Data Nodes                    |
|--------------------|---|--|---|-------------------------------|
|                    | Supercharged Atmosphere   |  | More Opportunity<br>Exciting Change / Challenge | Merger mean to you            |
|                    |   | SoB Demise   | Inform Each Other                               | Different Perspectives        |
|                    |   |  | CCE 2005 Christmas Party                        | Low Points of Merger          |
|                    |   |  | Out of Touch With Staff                         | Management Behaviour/Negative |
| Language of Change | War   | Process Too Long   | Inform Each Other                               | Different Perspectives        |
|                    |   |  |   | War/ Battle                   |
|                    |   |  | Fatigue<br>Relief/ Acceptance<br>Defeat         | Emotion                       |
|                    |   |  | Location<br>Long Process                        | Low Points of Merger          |
|                    | Renaming  | Disengagement  | Negative  | Staff Behaviour               |
|                    |   |  |   | War/ Battle                   |
| Humour as a prop   | Stir Wars   | Merger Not Takeover<br>About Their (Management)<br>Futures | Dishonesty                                      | Management Behaviour/Negative |
|                    |   | Stir Wars Merger Videos                                    | Negative  | Staff Behaviour               |
|                    |   |  | Stir Wars                                       | Artefacts                     |
|                    |   |  | Andy CCE Cat                                    |                               |
|                    |   |  | Anxious/Worried                                 | Emotion                       |
|                    | Word Game<br>Altered Advertisements<br>Merger Roadmap<br>Costumes |  | Out of Touch With Staff                         | Management Behaviour/Negative |
|                    |   |  | Whiteboard Word Game                            | Artefacts                     |
|                    |   |  | CCE Council Meetings                            | Low Points of Merger          |
|                    |   | CCE Merger Updates Email                                   | Official  | Communication                 |
|                    |   |  | Fairy Wings                                     | Artefacts                     |

| Themes                            | Themes Layer 1              | Nodes Layer 2                    | Nodes Layer 1  | Data Nodes                    |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| <b>Emotion</b>                    | Personal Relationships      |                                  | Relationships Tested                                     | Merger Mean to You            |
|                                   |                             |                                  | Anger  | Emotion                       |
|                                   | Defiance                    |                                  | Did Not Use  | Support                       |
|                                   |                             |                                  | Disillusioned<br>Imposed/ Lack of Control<br>Anger       | Emotion                       |
|                                   |                             | Ban On Staff Using All CCE Email | Official   | Communication                 |
|                                   |                             |                                  | Lack Of Confidence                                       | Management Behaviour/Negative |
|                                   | Destruction and Violence    |                                  |  | War/Battle                    |
|                                   |                             | Analogies                        | Intensity  | Emotion                       |
|                                   | Uncertainty                 |                                  |  | Uncertainty                   |
|                                   |                             |                                  | long process   | Low Points of Merger          |
|                                   |                             |                                  |  | Inevitable (merger)           |
|                                   | Intensity of Emotion        | Distraction/ Alcohol Coffee      | Negative   | Staff Behaviour               |
|                                   |                             | Cried Harassment                 | Intensity  | Emotion                       |
|                                   | Concern for Others          | Own School/Department/Area       | Networks   | Support                       |
|                                   |                             |                                  | Concern for others                                       | Emotion                       |
|                                   |                             |                                  | Loss   | Merger Mean To You            |
|                                   | Management Emotion          |                                  | frustration<br>insecure<br>Alienation<br>Anxious/Worried | Emotion                       |
| <b>Analysis of interviews</b>     | Difficult Review Transcript |                                  | Intensity  | Emotion                       |
| <b>Participant Categorisation</b> |                             |                                  | Management, Academic Staff, General Staff, Student       | Participant Type              |
|                                   |                             | Male/Female                      | Gender   | Base Data                     |

### 3.6 *Participant Observation*

This research component consisted of observing or interacting with institutional staff and management at staff forums, social functions, and on campus. And, to build a picture of the institutions, observations included physical areas such as, office locations, car park locations, and buildings. Office location or car-park access were recorded in case they illustrated status differences between general, academic, and management staff that were later reflected in the treatment of specific groups during the merger process.

Participant observation is a vehicle to disclose informants' practices that may not be identifiable in interviews. To facilitate participant observation I kept a research diary from March 2006 until August 2006. This diary has descriptive and reflective notes, and details relating to discussions, interactions, events, and settings, as per good practice suggested by Creswell (1998). It also contains feelings, thoughts, and observations of what people do (behaviour), say (language), and use (artefacts/props).

As I was a staff member at CCE, my observations were mainly from my participation at CCE. However, I was also a student at UC and knew staff there. I ensured staff were aware I was conducting this research by being open and discussing my research goals and progress with colleagues and staff at both institutions.

### 3.7 *Reflexivity*

Reflexivity is used throughout this study to discuss my own cognitive and emotional responses to the merger because these may affect the interpretation of data, analysis, and conclusions that I present. By making my feelings explicit, I aim to acknowledge and reduce any bias arising out of my role as a participant in the merger process. Reflexivity also proved a productive tool for me to generate ideas and establish connections and/or contradictions in the data.

To assist reflection I used my research diary from March 2006 until August 2006 to record, explore, and reflect on my personal feelings, hunches, experiences, ideas, and behaviour.

### 3.8 *Ethics*

Ethical considerations form part of any research study to ensure reasonable standards are met. As the appropriate ethical manner for a study is influenced by its nature, I acknowledged that the merger process was highly sensitive and adhered to the following ethical guidelines.

#### 3.8.1 *Ethical Guidelines*

- Approval - from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee was required; this was granted May 2006.
- Confidentiality - the privacy of participants was respected and any material that would identify an individual was kept confidential and not used in this thesis.
- Anonymity - the identities of participants were protected as references to participants are by alpha-numeric signifiers on interview notes (and the computer files that generate them); the key to these numeric codes is not stored with the interview notes. Names or position titles of participants are not used.
- Informed consent - all participants were provided with an information sheet briefly detailing the study purpose and contact details for any queries (refer Appendix C). Consent was sought from all participants using a consent form modelled on the standard designed by the UC Human Ethics Committee (refer Appendix F).
- Control - participants had the opportunity to withdraw their participation or supplied information from the study at any point; thus the scope for this research to create stress was minimal and under the control of individual participants.
- Reciprocity – participants will be offered the results of this study when complete as a form of giving back to participants who gave up their time (Fetterman, 1998).
- Review - all participants were supplied with the transcript and/or notes from their interview to check for inaccuracies (except one participant who said they did not want to review their transcript).
- Protect - materials are stored securely in locked filing cabinets under the control of the researcher and on personal computer drives that are password protected.

### 3.9 *Limitations of this Study*

Not all departments/areas of the institutions were interviewed. Although I consider students and stakeholder groups such as, family members, local community, and businesses, to be important contributors to the institutions, this study is limited in focus to staff and management as they arguably were the most affected by the merger.

Most of the qualitative data was collected via interviews, ideal for providing rich data but the quality of which is influenced by the skill of the interviewer (Kvale, 1996). My previous experience in conducting research interviews, combined with eliciting feedback after the protocol pre-test ought to have enhanced my interviewing skills. I also attempted to be a good interviewer by preparing prior to each interview, focusing my mind on the interview rather than conflicting pressures such as, work activities and examining how I felt before and after the interview.

The type of interview and interview conditions may further impact on the quality of data. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews were selected as I believed they were the most appropriate to achieve the research goals after reviewing different methodologies. Additionally, I tried to choose interview conditions that were conducive to sharing personal experiences by asking the participant where they felt comfortable being interviewed. Location options included: their office, my CCE office, or on one occasion off-campus at my home.

Being verbal reports, interviews are also subject to weaknesses such as, participant “bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation” (Yin, 2003, p. 92). In this study participants shared their own experiences at interviews conducted during the merger phase when change proposals were being released. I believe the recency of the interview to arguably the most contested phase of the merger enhanced recall ability. Participants were also able to convey their feelings and points in a coherent manner, possibly reflective of their profession (the education industry), which requires a reasonable level of communication skills.

### *3.10 Methodology Conclusion*

This study utilises four qualitative methodology data collection components. The first research component involved conducting 30 interviews with general and academic staff, management, and one student. Semi-structured and unstructured interview formats were chosen because they allowed individuals to share their experiences yet ensured participants provided information that would inform the research goals.

The second component involved analysing the interview data. QSR N6 was used as a tool for thematic analysis and for interacting with the data to illuminate ideas and build understanding of pre-merger social processes. I also created research memos in QSR N6 when analysing the interviews to record ideas (refer Appendix E). Once this analysis was complete, literature was again reviewed to explore how the emerging themes fit with existing merger literature.

Third, participant observation was captured using a research diary to record details relating to discussions, interactions, events, and settings.

The fourth component, reflexivity, is present throughout this study to share my responses to the merger, which may affect the interpretation of data, analysis, and conclusions that I present. To assist reflection, I used a research diary to record my feelings, hunches, experiences, ideas, and behaviour.

The themes that emerged from data analysis are discussed in the next chapter.

## **4 Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion**

### *4.1 Introduction*

In this chapter, I discuss the qualitative data analysis results collected through one-to-one interviews and participant observation. This chapter is structured around the exploration of four themes that were uncovered. And, to avoid personal tales being lost amongst the depiction of a theme in the same way as “individual stories of passion and betrayal get hidden in marriage statistics” (Boyle, 2000, p. xix), verbatim quotes have been included using quotation marks to preserve individual voices.

Management and staff voices from the research interviews were heard at arguably the most tempestuous pre-merger stage, when change proposals were rampant and social processes highly visible. This study seeks to reveal the social dynamics unleashed by this merger process it is not intended to be a criticism or justification of management actions. To respect participants’ anonymity I use neutral gender language and do not assign pseudonyms through which comments may be grouped and unwittingly identify participants.

### *4.2 From Interviews to Themes: Chain of Evidence*

A chain of evidence enables the reader to follow the origin of evidence from research questions to study findings (Yin, 2003). I discuss here how a chain of evidence was achieved for this study. First, I used an interview protocol that reflected the study goals and documented the circumstances under which the interviews were conducted, including: date and time, location, dress, and if the participant had recently received a change proposal. Next, each interview was recorded, transcribed, and entered into QSR N6, a qualitative data analysis system. QSR N6 was another link in the chain of evidence for it enabled efficient storage and retrieval of interview transcripts, research memos, and base data such as, participant type (general or academic staff, management, student), and gender. External documents including my research diary and organisational policies were also referenced in QSR N6.

Ideas that emerged from the interview data continue the chain of evidence. When collated across all 30 interviews, groups of ideas became visible and translated into data



trees. The idea/data trees containing the most text units formed into themes, as did small numbers of text units when they provided a unique view on an aspect of social behaviour (e.g. intensity of emotion visible through harassment). To reveal the link between themes and data sources, quotes are provided as evidence of each theme. And, to compliment the chain of evidence, my emic presence is acknowledged through participant observation and reflexivity.

The four themes examined here are: involvement, meaning making, the language of change, and expression of emotions.

### 4.3 *Involvement*

“Without involvement there is no commitment” - Stephen Covey

(<http://www.quotableonline.com/Involvement.html>, retrieved 19 October, 2007)

We all like to feel involved. Involvement signals we are valued, worthy of contributing, and have some influence on future outcomes. Hence, we feel part of the process, included, and in return are likely to display support and goodwill. Conversely, exclusion warns of powerlessness, and is likely to invoke disengagement and reduce motivation and effort. In the following sections I discuss participants' perceptions of their involvement in the merger process and how such views were reflected in their behaviour.

#### 4.3.1 *Mechanisms for Involvement*

In early 2006 cross-institutional working parties were created to review areas common to both UC and CCE and recommend action. These parties were perceived as a vehicle for involving staff. As one respondent observed, “oh look right at the beginning I felt we were very included. There was good consultation, there was good documentation being produced by working parties. I was on a couple of working parties, meeting with College people, discussing how we would go ahead and how we would merge the two infrastructures.” Staff also felt the working groups' facilitated people getting to know each other and working with new colleagues. One participant explained, “we set up a working party, a small one of people from UC and CCE to say how are we going to provide a particular service in a merged institution, and how are we going to provide that information within the change proposal process? So in those groups, like there wasn't anything that wasn't talked about. Whether it was officially decided or not officially decided, too bad, it was just open slather, you could cover anything you wanted to. And those groups all worked very well, I think.” The group referred to here was considered successful because members were honest and had the ability to share their views in an “open slather” fashion. Collectively, this created a means to express ideas and contribute to the merger decision making process.

Unfortunately, over time a perception developed that working parties were not listened to as this participant expressed, “there is a notion of consultation that isn't, words don't

mean squat, and words are plucked out as flavour of the month. There's a notion of something happening on high, people forming groups and working parties but it doesn't mean you'll be listened to. Working parties weren't listened to, they come up with something, which management don't take on board, even if it's a great idea with benefits, its already been decided, stakes are already in the ground." This comment indicated that as a method of involvement working parties were perceived as ineffective by staff because they "weren't listened to" for management had already decided what to do, "stakes were already in the ground." In this case it seems that actions speak louder than words and what was said about working parties contributing to decision making did not "mean squat," as staff perceived little evidence of working party ideas being implemented. Although appearing inclusive the working party process was undermined by a lack of transparency about why their suggestions or recommendations were not implemented.

Other mechanisms that existed for staff to get involved included: the merger website, where staff could ask questions; staff forums, where management presented information in a large road show style setting and invited questions from staff audiences; management committee meetings, where managers received updated merger information and could ask questions; staff department meetings; and the CCE climate survey. A management participant who explained the CCE merger communication methods to me admitted they were largely about conveying information and to a lesser extent about inviting staff to ask questions, "there's been an acceptance that there needs to be different ways of conveying the communication. So from a management perspective in terms of a management to staff communication, [there is the] Principal's communications, the Executive being more visible through fora and the use of a monthly Management Committee meeting, which is all the senior managers and takes mainly the form of an information briefing but is also an opportunity for issues and questions to come the other way." This acceptance of the need for varied information dissemination neglected to encourage, or focus on, inclusive two-way means of communication.

A CCE attempt to facilitate staff communication with management was the climate survey. This was undertaken 5-22 December 2005 in an "effort to appreciate the impact of these [merger and restructure] changes and to capture staff perceptions and issues"

(CCE, Workplace Climate Survey Report, 2006). Interestingly, the results showed that less than 50% of respondents agreed that communication had been conducted openly and honestly, and less than 35% felt positive about the future of the College. When a high level summary of the results were distributed late February 2006, a second climate survey was promised for June/July 2006 “to see how well we are doing” (CCE, Workplace Climate Survey Report, 2006). This further climate survey never took place; a move which I recall was greeted with cynicism. Staff believed management were not replicating the survey because no improvement would be visible given the significant change occurring via change proposals at that time. This meant the sincerity of the survey’s original purpose was questioned. Capturing staff perceptions and issues was an empty gesture if these were not seen to be acted upon.

Some means of involvement received mixed responses from participants, the merger website being an example of this. Positive comments included, “the merger website is actually quite good. And I have used it quite a bit.” Yet other participants were less sure, “once you get used to going in there and looking it up, it’s okay, but sometimes that stuff would be quite hard to find, or quite hard to figure out what you’re looking at.” And still other staff were unimpressed, “they set up a website and a website is a very inefficient way to do it. I mean even I can’t be bothered going to be website. It’s slow, it’s cumbersome, I think given the importance of it, a biweekly or a monthly even, newsletter would have been a, a copy in everybody’s hand would have been a better way of doing it.”

One participant suggested ways they would have liked staff to be included in the merger process, “just the odd email, [management] turning up at a staff meeting, taking initiative I suppose just to keep in touch with people, that would go a long way to helping people feel not quite so out on a limb, forgotten, uninformed.” This preference for face-to-face contact was shared by other participants who considered it a symbol management were making an effort to include staff for example, “even though he [a member of management] didn’t say anything and he couldn’t answer any questions because he didn’t know anything, so they were about as helpful as the [weekly activity update] emails, he was making the effort.”

#### 4.3.2 *Consultation*

The most visible means of staff merger involvement was the consultation process. However, it quickly became apparent that both UC and CCE staff felt cynical about this process. Participants implied: their input would not be listened to; management had made decisions prior to the consultation process being undertaken; and consultation existed because of legal requirements rather than to hear or consider staff views. Hence, consultation was treated with scepticism as this participant observed, “I guess the overall feeling that there are, everything’s like a token gesture, you know not just in our School, but across the board. When things have been going to change in the merger, people are asked for their feedback and consultation and discussion and all that, but it seems to me that at the end of the day, the decisions have either already been made or will be made by UC and [CCE management], the hierarchy if you like, and they are just going through the motions so that they can say, well we did ask for feedback.” Another participant when asked what they expected from the consultation period responded, “nothing, it will not affect any decision making unless there are unforeseen law implications,” and yet another boldly commented “I think the consultation period is a farce.”

Participants confirmed they were asked for feedback but believed their feedback did not mean anything to those in charge of the merger as this participant explained, “being asked stuff does not mean to say that what you have to contribute is actually going to be taken on in any kind of meaningful way, that you can say, yes I have been listened to.” Another staff member shared this view, “I have as much of an opportunity as anyone else to make comments on the change proposals. We shall see whether they are proposals or final decisions. I think that there is a high, high, high level of cynicism about that process.”

The idea that management did not act on feedback was also supported by this participant, “I’m sure the right words of response have come back from management. Whether in the final analysis they would have any effect, I don’t have any evidence, in fact there’s a certain amount of evidence as of now, that they’ve had no effect.” And still another staff member agreed, “I think the thing is, is that they have to be seen as doing the right thing. They have to be seen as going through a process. And the process

is, we will review, we will inform the review and decide.” This participant stated management “have to be seen” to go through the process, which implied it was an act rather than true consultation. Interestingly, they also refer to “doing the right thing,” indicating they believe genuine consultation was required and was the right thing to do.

The CCE Staff Consultation policy also supports the premise that the act of consultation is necessary. It uses McGechan’s definition of consultation as involving “the statement of a proposal not yet finally decided upon, listening to what others have to say, considering their responses and then deciding what will be done” (CCE, 2005a). If indeed consultation, as defined in the CCE policy, is the “right thing” to do staff cynicism implied management had not achieved this. It is likely management felt they had implemented appropriate structures for consultation but as these comments indicated staff did not believe in the verity of the process.

With this lack of faith in consultation it is unsurprising many participants disengaged. A participant shared that their colleagues “weren’t interested in putting a submission in. They’ve lost faith kind of thing, in the whole process really.” Another staff member commented, “I don’t think we’ve been consulted about anything, I think we’ve just been told.” Other participants felt engagement was futile. One stated, “oh, it seemed like they had already made their minds up long before this and there was just no way. There was just no strategy or proposal that could sway them.” And another participant shared, “they had their agenda already written, they knew what they were doing.” To explain their own inaction, this participant referred to the “predetermined” nature of the process in their admission that they “haven’t bothered looking at the website. Because like last year I came to the conclusion that the process, yeah last year I came to the conclusion that the process was kind of predetermined. So, the minute that you believe that the process is predetermined, you just need to wait and see what the outcome is going to be for you personally.”

Even offering suggestions was perceived by staff as being in vain, “when you feel like you can offer suggestions of things that will work better than others, generally it feels like it’s just ignored. So it’s a waste of time.” Another staff member discussed how being asked for feedback, which was then ignored made them disinclined to bother, and that being asked, disbelieved, and then attempting to be converted to management’s

way of thinking was frustrating. “It’s one thing being consulted but you don’t feel inclined to do it if they ignore everything you say or question everything you say and you feel like you have to justify. And I keep saying to them, look I’m telling you how it is, you want to ignore it, I don’t care. You want to do something different, it doesn’t bother me. But stop trying to make me agree with you. I’m giving you my opinion. I’m giving you my experience and you want to ignore it, fine.” If staff stopped providing suggestions to management, good ideas and alternatives would be lost, which may impede successful merger outcomes as a smaller set of options would be considered.

For some participants it was unclear how deliberately the consultation process was manipulated. As this participant surmises management may not include staff because they consider a decision irrelevant to a particular group, “my guess is, I think the Executive of the University and CCE, the College of Education, where they make part of these [decisions], is that they see some decisions as not being academic, and so they make a decision, boom, just like that and that’s it, finished. So I think probably that, it’s sort of a simplistic dividing up the world into what’s academic and all the other things that we just carry on and make decisions about.” Another participant believed that time pressure to achieve the merger contributed to consultative restrictions, “I don’t know how intentionally devious and sneaky it is, but I don’t know, if you go into the fully consultative type of open stuff, how long have you got? People are working to a deadline and to some extent they’ll do what is needed to meet that deadline.” Yet if an appropriate amount of time is not provided to collect and consider feedback then is that really consultation?

But it was not just the consultation process where staff felt excluded. This participant suggested “offensive” decisions were made about interviewing panels for positions in the new UCCE (UC College of Education) that excluded UC School of Education staff, “as an example, I was told for the appointment of the [UCCE] Head of School for the Educational Studies and Human Development, there wasn’t anybody from [UC] School of Education on the interviewing panel. It seemed extraordinary to me. Now that decision was made by somebody in the College of Education. So were they purposely excluding us? I don’t think so. Did they just not think? Probably. Was it a bad thing to do? Of course, it was an offensive thing to do and a totally ineffective thing to do. I don’t know how that was taken but it certainly, it was just misguided.” This

participant's comment implied management were unaware how their decisions would be perceived and that they were not paying enough attention to process.

Yet management believed there were well understood processes in place as the following statement shows, management assumed staff would know and accept that "there would be times when there was an opportunity for comment and there would be times of formal consultation and folk would know we were at those times, but otherwise we would just be getting on with a lot of the business around just constructing the merger." It is unlikely staff considered being provided with "an opportunity for comment," or "formal consultation" that has been described by staff as a "farce," as appropriate means of involvement in the merger process.

Timings associated with the consultation process were also raised as an area that lacked staff involvement. One participant recounted how their change proposal consultation period was shortened, "right, we were told on a Monday. Okay, so that leaves all of the Monday, you're nervous about it. The Tuesday you're dealing with the fact that you've been made redundant, only it starts to kick in by the end of that week we'd had enough, we all wanted to go home. We didn't, you know. The next week we're all really down and trying to make sense of what's going to be happening, trying to sort out what's going to happen to our jobs, as in who's going to do the jobs. So you're still trying to find things out, and then we get told that the consultation period has been shortened." This participant has described the need for an adjustment period, time to accept the situation, before thinking about writing a submission. It appears such adjustment involved, feeling nervous while waiting to see the proposal and how your position is affected, then feeling shock because "you've been made redundant," a shock that wears off towards the end of the week, which leaves people feeling "down." The emotional turmoil discussed here spanned two weeks, which was the time available for making a change proposal submission once the consultation period was shortened.

In this participant's experience the original consultation period was four weeks with submissions due early September. This was shortened to two weeks, with submissions due late August. Why was this period reduced by half? In an email to "all CCE" staff the following explanation was provided, "it has become apparent that the submissions by affected parties in this change proposal, and/or their representatives, may be received



by the end of next week or early on Monday 21 August. In anticipation that this may occur, and for operational reasons relating to the University enrolment process for 2007, the University and the College are altering the closing date for submissions by all other parties to noon on Monday 21 August.”

This explanation implied there were two reasons for the change. First, “affected parties” had made it apparent their submissions will be complete before or on Monday 21 August, suggesting that staff, who are affected parties, must have been involved in this decision. This showed a disconnection as the participant informed me they were “told that the consultation period has been shortened,” not asked when their submissions would be ready nor their input sought on the date change. The second motive provided was “operational reasons” around UC’s enrolment process. Hurrying submissions to adhere to existing enrolment processes does not seem conducive to consultation. And, what if a submission were made that suggested radical changes to the proposal, would the reviewers have an open mind to such change with impending enrolment deadlines? Here, it seemed management implemented a consultation structure without paying enough attention to the process. Shortening this period implied two things: i) management arrogance that whoever created the change proposal document had access to complete information and had made the best decision so it was unlikely submissions would uncover anything major, and ii) that little change to the proposal was likely as existing UC enrolment timeframes were a prevailing concern.

The participant elaborated their dissatisfaction about the consultation period being shortened, which again signalled they did not indicate their submission would be ready early. It also highlighted they felt it was unfair to reduce the timeframe because it impacted on the quality of their submission, “so that means that as you go through the whole process of everything, we weren’t given the extra two weeks, which meant we could have actually had a real brain-storming session, put some things down in sensible ways, not sort of emotional ways, you know what I mean? Actually done some really hard thinking about what we were going to put down and the ideas that we did put down in our submission, they would have been probably more thought out, more detailed, more intricate... So no I actually don’t think it’s been fair to us.”

The time allocated for the review of submissions was also considered an issue by participants. In the above participant's case, the review panel had three days to consider submissions and make recommendations to the Chief Operating Officer. And, as another participant explained about a different change proposal, time for reviewing submission was tight, "submissions were due on the 29<sup>th</sup> [August 2006]. The panel reviewing the submissions had until the 1st of September to make their recommendations for any changes to the change proposal to [the Chief Operating Officer]. That's three working days. There were 60 submissions." Three days to review submissions on a change proposal that disestablished people's positions and restructured a department. Is this enough time to perform consultation that involves "listening to what others have to say, considering their responses and then deciding what will be done" (CCE, 2005a)? Such timing does appear tight, especially considering that the merger process began in January 2005 and at this point had been running for 20 months.

This participant went on to observe that the review panel "are meant to have any changes they recommend to the change proposal to [Chief Operating Officer] by the 1st of September [a Friday] and then he has two weeks, well less than two weeks, he has until the, well, he's meant to release it to us on the 11th [of September], which is a Monday. So let's face it, he has a week to make any changes to that change proposal and then release it. Okay, read from that what you may, but I suspect there's not going to be a lot of changes to the change proposal. The timeframes are just too short... Maybe they might give us something that won't cost them much." The allocation of three days, out of a 20 month process, for a review panel to consider consultation submissions and make recommendations does not suggest much time for "deciding what will be done" as the CCE Staff Consultation policy requires. A further one week period to consider recommendations and amend the change proposal also seems tight. Combined, these timeframes suggest the content of the change proposal document would be difficult to amend. I was unsurprised this participant felt that there would only be token changes made in an effort to give "us something that won't cost them much."

The UC Policy Staff Change Protocols (UC Human Resources, 2004) states "the process of consultation will normally include... sufficient time for the consulted parties to assess the information provided and make an informed response; a reasonable

timeframe for these matters to take place; the University giving serious consideration to what the consulted parties have provided by way of submissions/recommendations. Notwithstanding this, the final decision relating to any change will be the responsibility of the Employer.” It is understandable staff felt sceptical that three days provided time for “serious consideration” of submissions, and that an additional one week was sufficient for the Chief Operating Officer to seriously consider recommendations.

#### *4.3.3 Staff Behaviour*

So far participants have conveyed their powerlessness to influence the merger through consultation and how they felt excluded rather than involved in the merger process. I will now discuss how this contributed to exit behaviour that included disengagement, withholding of effort, escapism, and defiance.

In this merger disengagement was not limited just to the process, as one staff member explained it also occurred between colleagues, “I think every time we get together as a group we’re sort of reminded of like what’s happening. And so you don’t want to be constantly thinking about the fact that your job might be disappearing and how am I going to pay my mortgage. So if you’re around people who just seem to remind you of that, either deliberately or accidentally just by their presence, then you try and avoid that, because nobody likes doing things that makes them feel uncomfortable or unhappy.” This participant expressed what it felt like to live with merger uncertainty, constantly aware your “job might be disappearing,” and the worry this invoked about financial commitments such as, “how am I going to pay my mortgage.” Yet, also indicated here is the social cost of this worry, which manifested in disengagement from colleagues because they were a constant reminder of the change.

In another act of disengaging from colleagues, a participant discussed how their behaviour had changed because they needed to emotionally prepare before interacting with staff affected by the merger. This resulted in the avoidance of some contact, “definitely not visiting people as much. I use the front door more. That’s how deliberate it is, I actually go in and out the front door rather than the main corridor and I know that it’s changed my behaviour. I don’t pop in to see people as much. I actually decide before I go over... I actually think about it and say, okay, do I do it and then I almost

have to be emotionally prepared to do it. And you never know, some days it's fine and nobody's worried." This participant made a deliberate decision to disengage from some interactions that were potentially emotional.

Also apparent was disengagement from the merger process itself. One participant commented that as soon as they knew they were voluntarily leaving the institution they disengaged from participating in the merger, "I haven't taken a huge interest because I knew several months back that I was going at this time. So once that was determined for me, I became something of a spectator." Other participants who had disengaged from the process mainly attributed this to the fruitlessness of engaging, as these comments illustrated, "generally you don't feel like you have any impact on better ways of doing things... Given up!" Another staff member experienced being "asked to go to meetings to discuss [merger processes] and you know that they won't take any notice of what you say anyway, so it's kind of like, why bother. I've got better things to do with my time." Staff needed to see results from their involvement to believe such activities were worthwhile investments of their energy. When this was not evident, these activities were perceived as empty gestures and a waste of time, resulting in staff disengagement.

However, a participant expressed that they believed disengagement had also contributed to a positive "bonding between general and academic [staff]... I think there's a lot of academic staff who are completely isolated on this and probably feel very disengaged as well, and in fact that's probably helping, in a sense that there's a bonding between general and academic because they are having things they hold dear to them just sort of chucked out the door, and feel very marginalised, just as much as a lot of general staff are." Although this participant felt disengaged from the process, their statement indicated they also felt a sense of loss for the "things they hold dear to them just sort of chucked out the door." The image used here of "chucking out" implied detachment of those organising the "chucking", which possibly contributed to staff feeling marginalised and of secondary importance to the overall goal of completing the merger.

Another exit behaviour discussed by participants was the withholding of effort. This manifested in reduced working hours and changed lecturer activities as this participant stated, "I certainly don't spend as much time at work as I did." Job insecurity also contributed to withholding of effort, "I have started to be more realistic about the

amount of time I put into lecture planning and assessment writing... I do think I deliver a quality product but I certainly haven't spent the hours and hours that I have in the past because I just think it might be the last time I ever teach it." This view was also shared by general staff, "why spend eight hours to 16 hours creating documentation about our system when that system won't exist next year."

Undoubtedly such behaviour impacted on students through limited new resources being developed and reduced access to staff. As explained here, "I will not have an open door policy anymore. I will have dedicated hours of which I will be here. I will not take work home as I usually do. I will not come in in the weekends to finish off bits and pieces. I will do what is required and no more." The type of contact with students also changed as staff were less willing to go the extra mile. For example, one participant shared that when a "student who was sort of saying, oh, I need some help with this assignment, I sort of say, well you really should have started sooner." Additionally, effort was withheld from research activities as this participant admitted, "research has certainly taken a back seat." Although aware of their exit behaviour, on occasion staff dismissed it as acceptable because of the burden of job uncertainty created by the merger process, as this participant observed "there's always comments coming, oh, it doesn't matter, I'm disestablished."

Participants also discussed expending less energy at work for example, "you know you've got all of this stuff that you've got to do at work, but you have a lack of energy, you can't do it... so it's been emotionally draining." One participant acknowledged the impact on productivity of such behaviour, "well there's productivity that has gone downhill straight away. Little work's being done at the moment as people are thinking about what they are going to do in terms of putting forward a [change proposal] submission or what the future might hold." This sentiment is encapsulated in a further staff member's quote, "motivation has been severely curtailed. I mean, basically we have been in limbo from the date that change proposal came out to submissions due." Staff seemed more likely to engage in exit behaviour such as, disengagement and withholding of effort, when they were concerned about their futures as their focus moved away from their day-to-day work to how their careers were affected, and what that meant to their families, mortgages, etc.

Reduced motivation towards work was also felt by participants. One participant explained they were, “unwell, lethargic, my motivation for doing my job is probably the lowest it’s been in the six years that I’ve been here.” Another said, “I have to kick myself every day to get myself motivated and to actually push myself to do it, but the job I do I do undertake it with the same commitment and the same values and everything, but you can be a wee bit less rigid.” Undoubtedly, feeling more lethargic towards work affected the amount of effort participants were prepared to invest in their jobs. A management participant acknowledged that staff motivation suffered during the merger process with this observation, “there’ll be other people who, like in any other change process, feel threatened. They don’t know where their place is. They might not well see that they’ve got a place. They might not have a place. So in that circumstance, motivation’s not going to be particularly high.” Here reduced motivation is tied to the reality of job uncertainty and the powerlessness that brings.

This lack of motivation also contributed to escapism with one participant suggesting they needed a break from work, “so I’ve got so many sick days left and so they’re going to be my mental health days. So I’ve already planned when I’m going to take those ones. I’m going to spend a day with my daughter when my partner takes his kids away for a holiday.” In some respects this is a hidden cost of the merger, although management would likely see an increase in sick leave. Another participant shared a similar feeling, “since the proposal came out [for their area] it’s the very first time since I’ve been at the College that I’ve actually felt like taking time off. Where you wake up and think I don’t want to go to work. Whereas before I’ve never had that feeling.” This sentiment was also felt by a further participant who said, “sometimes I have the childish fantasy that I would win lotto and I would walk. The only point to those sort of fantasies is it tells you something about what you might long to avoid in life.” With this statement they implied the merger was something they “long to avoid in life.” It is likely that staff who “don’t want to go to work” or fantasise about not having to go to work would be less committed and energetic towards the change process and show less goodwill towards their institution.

Some participants believed “goodwill has been lost” through the merger process. To staff it seemed there was “an assumption from the managers that we will go on as we usually do when you’re in the public sector, box on and not let it fall over and that you

will do anything to stop problems flowing on to the students. But I think that the goodwill bank is practically dry and I think next year [2007] will be more difficult, because you're just so tired with stuff." Staff also interpreted this "assumption" as people being forgotten in favour of process, "I think the management is too focused on preparing for the merger and is making no consideration for keeping the staff going through the whole process. They just expect staff to continue till the end of the year quite happily, which to me seems rather irrational." Staff being "so tired with stuff" implied the duration of the merger process had worn people out. For CCE staff the merger with UC and the CCE restructure, which staff saw as the same process but management did not, started in January 2005 and lasted all of 2006. For UC School of Education staff the College of Arts restructure occurred in 2005 with the merger process undertaken in 2006. These processes changed the way some staff felt about their institution as this participant declared, "I feel far less, I suppose, committed to and positively disposed to the University. I feel it's more of a, it's being run more in a corporate sort of way and income profit generating, profit meaning a margin of excess income over expenditure, in a way that's far more impersonal, aggressive and unfeeling."

Reduced goodwill and weariness of the process also applied to cross-institutional interactions where only limited patience was extended to colleagues. As this participant observed, "we're each in our little corner. But if we ask a too hard a question or a too sharp a question at this point, you sort of feel that the other lot will throw their toys out of the toy box. And it goes in both directions." This volatility complicated relationship-building and hampered merger progression by being unable to pose "hard or sharp" questions. And ultimately, some staff escaped from their work by focusing on other areas of their lives as this staff member explained, "I just don't care as much as I used to. You know, like I'm more interested in my home life and personal things I guess, they're more important to me than my job." Focusing away from work created a distraction from the merger process.

Escapism or distraction regularly came up during interviews with the main forms being casual drinks, social activities, and post graduate study. When participants were asked how they coped with the merger some participants responded with comments relating to casual drinks such as, "does alcohol count?"; "probably a bit more alcohol"; and "I must

admit I go home occasionally and think, God a need a wine and I'll have a couple of wines and yeah, some days are worse than others (laughing)." Another said, "I've drunk more coffee I must say (laughing), lots more. Considering I never drank coffee up until about November last year [2005]."

Focusing on social activities such as, networking, exercise, planning events, and watching TV, were other popular merger distractions. One participant explained renovating their house was a welcome diversion that also facilitated rebuilding social networks outside of work, "I guess at home, throwing a lot of energy into renovations, sort of made an effort to sort of re-contact say some friends who perhaps, like last year you were really busy with work. So the idea is to try and rebuild those perhaps social networks outside of work." And, for some staff the frequency of social activities with workmates increased, "anything that we can celebrate with a morning tea or champagne breakfast or drinks after work, we do."

Participants also felt exercise was a good way to calm down from the pressures of work as this participant shared, "I'll be ranting and raving all the way home. It takes a good long walk with the dog to calm down, yeah." As well as exercise, planning social events enabled participants to escape from work activities, "I get out and walk, especially with the warm weather coming out now, and catch up with family and friends and make plans for trips and things." Planning was also popular with this participant, "I love doing that so I'm planning my Mum's surprise 65th birthday. My partner's taking the kids around September to Queenstown so I'm just Googling whatever I can to find out there."

Another participant described how their partner helped relieve merger stress by planning activities for them both. Their partner was "very aware that I'm more stressed, we're actually having more planned activities at the weekend. Like we drive down to Ashburton, we go out walking and he makes me, because it's actually very easy for me to say at the weekend, look shut out the world, I don't want to talk to anybody. But I'm actually going out because the weekend is filled up." So instead of withdrawing socially, this participant had activities lined up by their partner, which distracted them from the merger on the weekend. Others used music as a diversion, one participant had "started a band, that's super (laughing)." And another enjoyed playing music to forget



about the merger once a week, “I play music... and nothing gets in the way of that. It’s my kind of sanity night where I’m with a whole lot of really different kinds of people and we don’t talk about any of this [merger] stuff, we’ve got more important things to talk about.”

Still more distractions included TV and puzzles, “the other thing that I’m doing a lot of that actually helps, I actually do jigsaw puzzles at home, I hadn’t actually done any for ages but I need something that mentally, if I just sit at home and do nothing, it [the merger] just goes kachung, kachung, kachung. So I do things like jigsaw puzzles because they focus your attention.” Also popular was TV, “stick me in front of Boston Legal which I love and adore, so sadly I have become a TV addict, but it’s only because of the escapism in it. Which is cool, it is actually quite nice, yeah.” This activity was jokingly summed up by one participant, “TV ratings will probably do really well through times of redundancy (giggling).”

Some participants saw the merger as a catalyst to up-skill and increased the rate of their existing post graduate study, which also allowed them to escape from the process. As this participant explained job uncertainty was a driver to complete their study, “I was thinking of putting that paper off for a year as my last paper and then I thought, oh no, I’d better not do that because I imagine the job will be over by the end of the year. So yeah, I’m focusing on doing that for me.” Another participant agreed, “it motivated me to put a lot more emphasis into my areas of research and academic development through doing qualifications. So probably because of the pressure this merger has put us under, I am perhaps a year, two years ahead of where I may have been with regard to my development of research and work towards completing a PhD than otherwise.” This distraction seemed positive as their effort will result in higher qualifications. However, it would have created additional pressure to complete study, while coping with the merger demands and job uncertainty.

Finally, exclusion from the merger process also led to defiant exit behaviour on both personal and group levels. First, at a personal level this participant’s defiance manifested in their reluctance to accept assistance or use services supplied, “this is probably a bit silly, but there’s also a part of me that is very anti-College. So, you know like they’re offering free massages and things like that and I just sort of scoff at it and

think, well, I don't want them to be able to turn around and say, well you took advantage of this and you took advantage of that and look at all the lovely things that we did for you. And I know that that's very bloody minded." This personal act of defiance may have gone unnoticed by management, yet it was an exit strategy that signalled the participant was disengaging from the organisation.

Second, from a group perspective I recall School of Business staff displayed defiance by walking out of a scheduled meeting with an external consultancy firm commissioned to make recommendations about the School's future (after the sale process was closed). This act was in defiance of the change process that provided one meeting as the only opportunity for staff involvement in the decision about their future. It was intended to send a clear message to management that staff were not engaging in such a superficial attempt at consultation. Another participant recounted their awareness that some staff were being defiant by sharing negative views about the merger with students, "the students that I've had contact with hear more about the negative. You know, they may have a lecturer or somebody who's quite disaffected, and has shared that with their students, which isn't necessarily the best thing or the most professional thing."

A student confirmed this and described to me what they had heard from staff after a change proposal release, "well, I've heard a couple of different things... it [the change proposal] wasn't actually presented by management here. That certainly didn't help how staff felt, and then that it was, as I said earlier, it was almost like a PowerPoint presentation in which you were trying to sell a product. That's how it was described to me... they [staff] felt that that was it, the jobs were gone. Forget it, it's over. That was how, that was the initial feeling by a lot of people. We've [staff] been given no security at all and they couldn't see past or beyond that." The student also shared their frustration with management behaviour regarding the lack of communication about what was happening, which was explained away as necessary. This student recalled being told by management the "reason for not communicating anything more to students was because they were in an informational mode. Yeah, and that once Dr Cullen signs or the business case is approved, then they move into the operational mode, which is when they start actually communicating with students." The merger was approved by the Minister for Tertiary Education (Dr Cullen) on August 18, 2006. It was acknowledged in the merger announcement to "all CCE" staff that same day that this

approval came after “16 months of hard work by staff at both institutions.” Given that the merger came into effect January 1, 2007, this left only four months to move into “operational mode” and communicate with students. From a staff perspective the change process commenced with the first announcement that a merger was being considered by the CCE Council. That announcement occurred in January 2005, so by August 2006 the process duration (from a staff point of view) was 20 (not 16) months.

Another form of defiance was allowing merger events to become public. One participant expressed how negativity about the merger being in the public domain was not good for the organisations, “I think one of the other things that was difficult last year was certainly the School of Business, where that became quite public and at the same time where we had the College of Arts restructuring and financial stuff which was in the Press, and I think that those are unfortunate for the organisations, when it starts to get into that public domain.” I asked this participant what they thought that said about the process and they just sighed. This sigh, I believe, signalled resignation. Perhaps staff resorted to the public domain because they felt they had nowhere else to go to influence change. If so, that implies the process lacked mechanisms for staff to vent or express their feelings about the merger, leading them to resort to defiant behaviour.

One management participant considered staff going public to be a low point in the merger, “the bits that have gone public already where, the Business School’s the classic case, to me there have been people involved in the Business School who have deliberately misrepresented the case and made it more complicated and difficult than it needed to be.” However, they did concede that “I don’t know that the communication structure around those [School of Business] decisions was as good as it could have been, and therefore things got public too quickly and therefore people found themselves in a trench position because they’d spoken publicly and couldn’t back off. And so you ended up with more, what looked like a gaping divide between the two sides.” A language of change that includes battle analogies is used here with references to trenches and sides but it is not clear why going public was a low point for this management participant, although it is implicit that negative views about the merger in the public domain would reflect poorly on the institutions involved. I suggest going “public” was unwelcome by management because as an act of defiance it attempted to influence change by mobilising public support.

Another management participant implied the institutions were lucky so few negative views had been made public with this comment, “if you sat down and added up all of the [change] proposals and if you added into that all of the jobs that have gone at CCE over the last 18 months, I think what has been really quite fascinating to watch is that CCE have gone through so much, such great reduction in staff over the last year and a half, and it hasn’t even hit the media.”

Another management participant explained the importance of the merger being achieved with as little detrimental attention as possible, “I think probably one of the things that’s most important in actual fact, is doing it [the merger] in a way that is as positive as possible, and attracts less detrimental attention, be it from the public and politicians and staff. So it is a political process, it’s a political, social process.” There is recognition here of the political aspect in any change process. Implicit to politics is the requirement for effective influencing skills in order to achieve a satisfactory outcome. Hence, it is likely these defiant acts were attempts to influence an unsatisfactory process before participants resorted to exiting the organisation.

#### *4.3.4 Involvement Conclusion*

Overall, staff were offered a variety of means to get involved with the merger that included working parties, a website, forums, management meetings, department meetings, and consultation. Yet, although management had put in place what they considered appropriate structures to facilitate consultation, staff believed it was an insincere charade. This belief appeared to be driven by management not paying enough attention to processes such as, disseminating decisions (and why they were made) from working parties, determining change proposal submission timeframes, and selecting interview panels. There were also no mechanisms for staff to vent or share their feelings about the merger. As staff felt excluded from the change process and incapable of influencing decisions, this led to exit behaviour comprising of: disengagement, withholding effort, escapism, and defiance.

The next section examines meaning making. A discussion that highlights how different experiences for management and staff led them to attribute different meanings to the merger.

#### 4.4 *Meaning Making*

“The meaning of things lies not in the things themselves, but in our attitude towards them” - Antoine de Saint-Exupery

(<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/meaning.html>,

retrieved 25 September, 2007)

How people respond to situations is influenced by what it means to them. The meaning people attribute to different circumstances or interactions can expose how they interpret those events. During one-to-one interviews merger participants revealed the merger meant to them: loss, disestablishment, dissatisfaction with the change proposal process, personal impacts, workload changes, and opportunity. And, as staff and management largely attributed different meanings to the merger this contributed to a supercharged organisational atmosphere.

##### 4.4.1 *Loss*

To many, the merger meant loss. During interviews, participants shared their sense of loss for their School/department, job, colleagues, institution identity, and autonomy. The most tangible loss was jobs and departments. People's positions were disestablished, colleagues left, and departments closed or were restructured in change proposals. Such loss is summed up by this staff participant, “it [the merger] means the end of a very successful school which is an injustice, the end of teacher education as we know it, a huge change for a whole lot of very devoted and loyal staff, uncertainty.” This statement referred to two endings first, the School of Business and second, teacher education in its current form, revealing the merger meant enormous change and uncertainty.

Another staff member shared their sense of personal loss, “it [the merger] means loss of reputation, personal reputation. It means loss of job... It's loss of colleagues. It's loss of self-esteem, it's everything... and, yeah, while working in an environment where there seems zero empathy.” To me, this statement highlighted that a job means more than just a salary. It also provides reputation and self-esteem therefore, for this participant the loss of their job brought into question their personal reputation and affected their self-esteem.

However, loss was not limited to a fixed event such as, disestablishment. As this next participant suggested the realisation of loss occurred constantly throughout the merger, “I think there are lots of little losses that go on and those losses have been going on for College people now for quite a long time. Like you [author] leaving and those sorts of things are losses for people over there [at CCE]. But I think there are little losses along the way because you think it’s not going to be like that and I’m not going to be doing it that way.” And, for another participant the potential disestablishment of their role meant a realisation that they may lose their anticipated, assumed future, “I’ve always enjoyed my job and the people I work with, and it would be sad to go and I always sort of thought that I would probably be here until I didn’t want to work anymore. But perhaps not.”

Feelings of personal loss were compounded by the loss of colleagues and friends, “I think some people who have been here for a very long time, it’s really like losing your family and so for them it’s kind of this triple whammy sort of thing. It’s like I’m not only losing perhaps my source of income and maybe looking at having to change my profession, but also I’m losing all the people that I socialise with so like all my friends.” Even participants who did not lose their own job felt a sense of loss for the way things were and for their colleagues, “so although you are not, I am not directly, my job’s still there, there’s the sense of loss that you experience and it changes how things are, and you and you can’t go back to that, when people who you work closely with lose their positions.” There was also awareness that the community of colleagues would be gone after the merger, “we still do have a sense of community that is actually still there and an awareness that that sense of community is going to be lost.”

Staff shared sadness about their loss of colleagues through, what they described as, the splintering of working groups, “I feel like we’ve been shattered into pieces. We do work very closely on a daily basis and even if people do get jobs at the University, we will still be working for the same company and that’s as far as it will go probably. And that’s a wee bit sad, yeah. We’re just shattered to pieces really.” A merger response that was shared by this staff member, “we’re not only dealing with change from the merger, we’re friggin’ dealing with change from restructure. So what they’re doing is, they’re not breaking up the family, but they’re breaking up the family and shifting everyone off to deepest darkest Siberia or wherever, you know.” This quote laments colleagues

moving to other roles but also those disappearing from the institution altogether as a result of the merger.

Management admitted feeling discomfort about the loss of positions but implied there were no alternatives due to financial reasons. As this member of management explained, “I would have liked to have thought, that had there been a different financial circumstances that more of our academic and general staff would have been able to be a part of the future. Significant numbers of staff members, I mean, you’re aware of 51 last year and however many it’s going to be this year, we are talking about a very large number of staff [who have left or will leave]... and it doesn’t sit comfortably with me as a person.” Although this participant did not refer to a sense of loss for colleagues, they acknowledged significant numbers of staff were affected by job loss.

Participants also expressed a loss of institutional identity. This participant used the end of the institution as they knew it to describe the merger, “the merger to me sort of signals the end of something really good. I think we’ve built something really amazing here.” Another staff member believed the merger meant a loss of the institutional era, “a big part of it is the end of something, the end of an era, the end of a way, the end of a group of people, a system, a process that will end. That whatever it is replaced by is a different entity.” Such institutional changes left this staff member feeling lost, “it’s kind of like your sense of identity is sort of, it will disappear. Yeah, you kind of sat around thinking, what do I do now?”

Loss of institutional identity was not limited to CCE, the smaller of the two merging parties, for UC’s School of Education would move from being part of UC’s College of Arts into the new UC College of Education. This staff participant could see both sides of the institutional identity loss, “College losing their sense of autonomy and identity is going to be a really big thing. I mean, it’s a long established institution, it’s an end of an era... And I think for [UC] it’s a loss because as the College is feeling like its being swallowed up by the University, the University [School of Education] is going to be merging into a bigger group of people. So a sense of loss of identity [of UC’s School of Education] perhaps.”

Management also expressed a sense of institutional identity loss. This management participant acknowledged CCE's long history and was nostalgic that the sense of a "small town" community would not exist after the merger, "its [CCE has] got a history alongside [UC] that is 130 years old, so you feel a sense of loss I guess... that that institution's no longer there and I know it's going to be quite different under the new system. That, that kind of small town feel of the College is not what this university feels like at all. I keep saying to people that you've got to understand that right now this university is the same size as Ashburton and nobody in Ashburton knows everybody, it's not the way those places work. It's not Culverden, its Ashburton. So I feel a bit of sense of loss about all of that."

To management the merger also meant loss of autonomy as described here, "for me personally, what I've felt might happen in the merger, has happened. I don't enjoy being answerable to executives from another organisation. I don't find that a stimulating environment and as a result of that, it's crystallised what my future is going to be, which I had been considering taking up [a] position... which was on offer, but I've now declined that and am taking voluntary redundancy at the end of the year." This loss of autonomy may be representative of a lack of respect between the institutions as alluded to by this management participant, "absolutely lost everything and the further it goes on, the more you lose. There's not a lot of consultation, it's a matter of us changing and although they are, to me the corner stone of the success of the merger, if you're looking for success, is the respect at the highest level... but I don't altogether believe that that's perhaps translated lower down into one-on-one situations between the College and the University. I don't believe that the same sort of respect has shown itself." This member of management believed there was respect shown between the institutions' executives that was not present in non-senior management interactions. They also acknowledged autonomy at all levels was lost because CCE needed to change to UC's procedures and practices.

To participants the merger meant loss of job, reputation, colleagues, community, institutional identity, and autonomy. Loss was not centred on a particular event but felt through various endings such as, School closures and performing tasks for the last time. These endings led to the realisation that after the merger, participants' futures would be



different and their colleagues would be scattered throughout UC or into other organisations.

#### *4.4.2 Disestablishment*

In the words of one participant, “terrible word, disestablished, isn’t it.” Terrible as it was, to many staff the merger meant disestablishment. And, as these participants agree disestablishment meant personal rejection “people were thinking, my goodness, we’re doing a bad job here. Personalising it themselves”; “the ones [staff] that have been disestablished had lots of feelings of, as I said before, perhaps of not being wanted, being unsure about their future or their career and what choices they might want to make”; and “things were taken personally within the first two weeks, and it was, well why has that person got a job when they’re useless or they can’t do their job properly and why haven’t I got a job. So they took it very personally.” Most participants accepted that disestablishment was a negative message, “seems a very, I suppose it seems a negative message, more like a not wanted message. But I’m sure that’s certainly not the intention.” Intended or not, staff interpreted disestablishment as rejection.

Participants were unsure why disestablishment prevailed and so few position matches occurred between CCE and UC. As one participant explained UC was “very keen to see CCE staff come into UC, yet nearly every change proposal is showing position disestablished.” Another participant seemed just as confused, “so the process has led to that outcome and you’re thinking, but [UC] said [they] want the staff. And I think that is a real low point because it’s certainly changed the relationship with the CCE staff. I think just as one of these [change proposals] has come out after another, it’s been hard to keep up morale... and it’s just awful.” This staff member agreed, “I guess I’m uncomfortable with the disestablished words, I think they could be a bit nicer... I was just a bit surprised that there wasn’t more sort of closer matches.”

Some comments from management implied they understood what disestablishment meant to staff such as, “I think that’s been destructive because it means that when you say, none of them [positions] are comparable, which is pretty much what’s happened in all of them [change proposals] up to this UCCE one, then it means that the positions are

disestablished. And, of course, HR people will tell you that it's only the position which has been disestablished, not the person, but you know, the person that's holding that position doesn't see it that way. And it means, I think, that it sends them a message that you're not wanted, you're not up to it, no job there for you." This management participant recognised that disestablishment felt personal and sent a "not wanted" message even though HR purported it was the position, not the person that was disestablished. After all it was the person who had to worry about how to pay their mortgage, not the position.

But other management participants did not seem to appreciate the meaning staff attributed to being disestablished. This management member considered disestablishment to mean just "asking for" a position rather than being transferred to it, "a lot of people suddenly saw their names or their position with the word disestablished next to it. This causes people to take a deep breath, of course, and it's another step for them to get their heads around the fact that there's probably a job in the new structure that they would get but they've got to go through a process. Asking for it rather than being transferred to it." And, even though another management participant agreed that disestablishment was a negative message they hoped affected staff would see opportunities in the merger, "well, I mean when you read it the first time, you get gob smacked. I'm worthless, nobody sees what I'm capable off, I'm just disestablished. That word seems to rings out. And I guess on day one that's all you see is disestablished. A couple of days later you might see that there are some opportunities." They explained that disestablishment was "not great" but felt it presented staff with a positive opportunity to change career direction, "as I said it's not great to read next to your name that you've been disestablished but when you get past that it's well, you know I've been kind of locked into doing this and suddenly there's these other jobs that have come available and I might like to pit myself against... this gives you an opportunity to go and expand your horizons, do something different."

One management participant considered voluntary redundancy to be an opportunity for staff to positively move on with some additional funds, "there are others for whom they've gone, opportunity finished at this place and take some money and go. I think the hardest ones are those who haven't accepted that." These quotes showed management saw the positive side of change and even considered it an opportunity. However, they

appear a little dismissive of disestablishment being a serious issue for staff, even though it affected their income, career, and self-confidence.

Interestingly, another member of management explained the merger was actually a takeover situation so staff should not be overly surprised by the loss of jobs, “it’s not really a merger, it’s really actually a takeover, a disestablishment process, and that’s kind of a hard reality for some people to get their heads around.” Perhaps it was difficult for staff to accept this “hard reality” because management had fostered the merger message throughout the process, and in mergers a new institution is created rather than just one extinguished. Another management participant agreed job losses were just part of the merger course, “you couldn’t imagine a merger occurring with more staff being employed. By definition, a merger will downsize, the combined institution will be smaller than the two existing ones. If it’s not, well why did you do it?” Management were in charge of the merger with access to more information, hence what was obvious to them may not have been to staff. It seemed staff were unaware so few positions would match and transfer to UC versus the number of roles that would be disestablished.

One participant suggested people were not management’s top concern because they had a merger to accomplish, “I don’t think it’s [people] top of their agenda because, I’m not saying... that they are mean and that they don’t think about the staff... you’re talking about positions and structures and money and this and this and this, and you know there’s people in there, and you know the people and you feel bad about it, but you’re just doing this job and I do think that the people are going to get forgotten a little bit in this.” This suspicion was confirmed by a management participant who told me, “and another thing is that, I mean this is a rather callous thing to say, but the long term view of the College and the long term health of the College, is more important than individuals over this period of time, and in a way staff happiness, it is on the list, but it’s not high up on the list.”

Another area associated with disestablishment raised by participants when asked what the merger meant to them, was job searching. Some participants were optimistic about such a search whereas others recognised it could require considerable change. As an academic staff participant acknowledged there was a possibility they would not secure a

job in Christchurch, “it may mean a career change. The reality is that it may even mean a city change at some stage or another in the future as well.” The impact of changing cities is much larger than changing roles. It involves leaving friends, family, and professional networks at an already turbulent emotional time. In contrast another staff member felt optimistic that although they expected the merger meant, “probably no job, there may be something I can be deployed to I’m hopeful about that. Either a lower position or a higher position, there’s some possibilities there. Otherwise, I’m all, if I don’t have a position then I will have to look for another one somewhere else.” And even though another staff member had made a choice to apply, and was approved, for voluntary redundancy they admitted still feeling uncertain about job searching, “I’m scared. I’ve got to go out and find a job. I’ve got to sign up with agencies. I’ve got to do this.”

In addition, a participant questioned their optimistic reaction to the seriousness of the situation where they may potentially lose their job, “I don’t feel in trepidation. I don’t feel fear but a questioning. I am questioning myself why I’m perhaps not, am I taking this as seriously as it really is. But I guess I have a sense of self-belief in myself too. Things will work themselves out... And I believe I have confidence in my own capability of moving on and finding myself a new career if need be.” In this case their self confidence meant they believed they would secure another job if necessary, which contributed to less anxiety about job searching than someone lacking such confidence.

Yet it was not only staff participants that expressed the need to search for a new job, management were also unsure what the future would hold. As this management participant shared, “whether I’ll struggle or not, I don’t know yet, but all I’m concentrating on is doing a good job for the rest of this year. There’s a tinge of concern about when you get to [my age], it isn’t an ideal environment to go looking for a new job. But I’m fairly philosophical about those sort of things, I have contacts, not that that’s going to necessarily produce anything, but I’m a generally optimistic sort of person so I have this blind optimism that something will come along (laughs). And when you see me sitting on the street with a hat in front of me (laughing) this time next year, remember that I said that.” This joke shows they recognised the uncertainty job searching brought, which staff were also feeling but remained optimistic.

#### *4.4.3 Change Proposals*

Participants also shared what the method for disestablishment, the change proposals, meant to them. The two main concerns raised by participants were, i) the delivery, and ii) the motives of disestablishment. First, the actual delivery setting varied for most staff groups as management attempted to find an optimal approach. Library staff were told separately at slightly different times on the same day, resulting in UC staff leaking information to CCE colleagues before they had seen the change proposal document. To address this, later change proposals required both UC and CCE staff to be present at the same meeting.

An approach that was considered traumatic by CCE staff who were disestablished when their UC colleagues were not such as, the enrolments and records team. As this staff member explained, “I don’t see why we had to go over to the University. I would have preferred us to be taken to, I don’t know, if you’re going to tell someone that kind of information, wouldn’t it be best to think, okay, where’s a nice environment where they can be told and then afterwards, either get together in that environment and discuss it or go somewhere else... So there was the foreign people, the foreign location.” An unfamiliar location and people meant the change proposal environment was intimidating and unpleasant for CCE staff. One management participant admitted they did not think these change proposal deliveries had been ideal, “to have people bussed across to the other institution and know that you’re going to be in a meeting with people from the same area that you work in and to be told that you’re all disestablished and they’re not, isn’t a kind way to go about doing things.”

Another approach saw the CCE School of Business change proposal being delivered at the School with only CCE staff present. A different approach again was used for the new UCCE structure proposal which this participant explained, “the Head of School was to contact people and then arrange for a meeting if their jobs were going to be implicated in the change proposal and then the change proposal came out later that day. That, to me, was a really bad process because the people who had their jobs disestablished knew in the morning and the change proposal didn’t come out until about 4.30 in the afternoon. I think that was, maybe everyone else could have waited until then, but I think those people who have been told that their jobs would be disestablished

had the right to see the change proposal, the right to see what other jobs might be available and I thought making them wait that time was very difficult.” The suspense associated with this approach seemed unpleasant for staff who were disestablished, for they had to wait a number of hours before seeing the document to discover if any new positions had been created that they could apply for.

Participants also shared what the delivery of the change proposals meant to them. This participant expressed feeling insignificant from the experience, “it left me feeling flat and disillusioned as it was a cold, callous document, which was delivered smilingly with no sensitivity toward the people involved. I was left feeling dehumanised, insignificant and viewed the position of the change management team as seeing [us] as an inconvenience in the greater picture. A fine reward for years of hard work and loyal service.” The implication that the delivery did not convey sensitivity appropriate to the content is supported by another staff member’s comment, “I was also disappointed in the way the information was presented because it was quite callous and it was just presented that we went straight to the table showing every position being disestablished.” Yet another participant agreed, “I think they were a bit too cheerful. It’s like every job has been disestablished and they [management] are all smiles... You know, it’s like that just seems wrong. You know, you’re telling people that their job is gone and you’re all smiley about it. That’s just wrong.”

Staff also described that in addition to the delivery it was a shock to hear the news contained in the change proposals, “oh bloody oath, I was just so wild with him [change proposal presenter]... because he started off the meeting by saying, oh, I’ve done so many of these [change proposals], they are starting to all run into one another... I mean, we had no idea what he was going to say to us. I didn’t know everyone was going to be disestablished. I thought only some would. I thought some positions would remain. So when he said, all the positions in [department name] would be disestablished, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, it was like, shit, you know, back it up, mate.” Management’s statement that the change proposals were running into one another showed a lack of empathy and suggested the situation was commonplace, yet to staff it was a unique situation and only their change proposal mattered. It also seemed the delivery of the unexpected “all positions” disestablished news was not given much attention and staff found it difficult to process the information.

In another change proposal it was not clear which positions were disestablished until after the meeting when the actual document was distributed, as this staff member explained “we were given, our managers were given bundles of the documents, and we all went back to the department and they were handed out, and in the back [of the change proposal] you then had to go through and look for your position and find out whether it was mapped or disestablished.”

The lack of the CCE Principal or UC Vice Chancellor at change proposal meetings was also questioned, “I think sometimes that people higher up could perhaps have taken a more personal approach to it rather than it being through managers or sort of publication type things. Actually... come into the meeting and talked to [us] about the change proposal rather than just sending the change proposal through.” And this participant agreed, “where was our CCE Principal? Surely he should be able to stand up before us with a change document that delivered such bad news and that he was a party to.” It appeared staff wanted the head of the institution at the change proposal delivery to accept responsibility for the document.

Yet management participants felt the change proposal delivery process had improved through the merger process and that they were trying hard to get it right, “we’re literally walking on egg shells in terms of Monday [UCCE proposal release]... So they are trying to do everything they can.” Another member of management confirmed they were happy with the written change proposal documents but less comfortable with the content that saw many people disestablished, “um...well as technical working documents, I’m very pleased with them... And so I’m pleased with them in the way they have been written up, not necessarily in the content of them, but I’m pleased with the process that has allowed them to be written up and the engagement that folk have had with them... I don’t think I like what’s in any of them, why would I, when at a personal level you see so many people who aren’t going to make the cut.”

The second main change proposal concern raised by staff participants was the motives behind them, “I think the objective of the change proposal is to force staff into competition with each other and I hope that staff can rise above that because I think it’s got the potential to be really destructive and, on top of everything else, that is the last

thing that people need.” Other staff members thought the proposals were a mechanism to remove certain individuals, “[I] looked at, like the process that was going to be put in place, and then I looked at the job description and came to the conclusion that they will use the process and the job description to weed out people that they don’t want.” This distrust of the fairness of the process was reiterated by another participant, “it seems very political, the change proposal, in that they were trying to get rid of certain people and that they had juggled things around to make sure that they achieve that... My boss and I started analysing, who had been disestablished, and it becomes very apparent that it’s the people that are vocal and opposed to things or likely to cause trouble.”

It was also implied a change proposal motive was to remove groups of staff, “there’s an element of choice in every case and that’s determined by UC, and the academic staff in [the School of Business] is a good case in point. They are the same jobs essentially and they could be transferred, of course they could, they could be transferred and they carry on for another two years and redundancy at the end point. And they weren’t. They were all disestablished on the premise that, oh it was permanent and now it’s a fixed term. Well, we’ve got two staff who are fixed term now. So, yeah that doesn’t wash with me.”

Management were aware of the controversy around change proposal motives but felt the process was transparent because if positions were not an 80% match they were disestablished. It was explained to me that there were “HR [human resources] processes to determine whether this position matches that position and they don’t stray from that because if you do, there’s all sorts of issues that might happen later in terms of grievance issues or union issues or HR issues or whatever.” Does this mean it is easier for management to disestablish positions rather than try and transfer them and potentially face issues from disgruntled staff who did not want to be transferred?

Nevertheless, an obvious question seemed to be why not lower the match threshold from 80% to 50% and then transfer more positions and reduce the number of staff disestablished. When I put this to management, one participant clarified “these protocols are worked out with unions, it’s not just a matter of people running a merger, there’s been endless discussions about these transfer arrangements... There’s also a question of fairness to people, I guess you could transfer everybody but if the job’s not the same, what about the competencies to do the jobs, there are all sorts of these HR



issues that would come into play here and so I think they've tried to look at it dispassionately. Some flexibility to allow a transfer to take place where that's possible, but you don't want to be being dishonest to people transferring them into a job that they might not have done before, don't want, don't know how to do, don't have the competencies to do." These are valid points but if staff did not want an opportunity to be transferred why were staff, and some management participants, so surprised by the lack of position matches? The involvement of staff in this process may have prepared people for the scale of disestablishments or even informed management and union decision-making when writing these transfer protocols.

Given the number of participants affected by disestablishment, and the passionate discussion it provoked at interviews, I requested from management the number of staff that had left CCE since the merger and restructuring processes began and the reason for leaving for example, voluntary redundancy, retirement, transfer to UC, etc. In response, I was referred to the 2004 and 2005 annual report to ascertain such figures. My request for reasons of staff turnover was denied, via email on September 15, 2006, on the grounds that "all information is recorded through the payroll system with limited fields and as stated in my previous email, the detail you require is not captured." I was surprised that in a turbulent merger environment senior management had not collected, and monitored, both the numbers and reasons staff were leaving. I also wondered, without this information, how senior management provided the Press with staff turnover and redundancy figures.

It seemed management perception of disestablishment differed to staff. Staff saw disestablishment as a personal rejection. They doubted the change proposal motives, considered the delivery process to be flawed, and did not understand the lack of position matches. Management recognised staff would feel unwanted by disestablishment but saw it as an inevitable part of a fair and transparent process. They also believed it was an opportunity for staff to do something different by changing roles.

#### *4.4.4 Personal Impact*

Participants also conveyed that the merger had a personal impact, which affected participants relationships, confidence, moods, career, and provoked self-assessment. First, personal impact was illustrated by a participant who described the merger as, “an experience that I hope, I never want to repeat. I would go to huge lengths to avoid an environment like this again. I am totally wounded by it and I don’t think I would be physically or mentally strong enough to go through a similar thing again, not yet anyway.” To them the merger meant emotional injury and exhaustion. Another staff member felt the merger was life-changing, it was “a process, an event, a thing that you go through which is unlike anything else, I think. I don’t think it ever prepares you for it, and other people who have been through mergers will know what its like.”

And, these personal impacts were compounded by seeking solace in other affected colleagues, “trying to process it yourself as an individual and then, at the same time, people are seeking solace in similarly affected colleagues, who may or may not be able to provide the kind of pastoral care that one needs at that particular moment.” Personal concern also spread to concern for colleagues, “it’s more that awareness of people. You become hugely more aware of people’s situations and yeah, there’s concern for them.”

Second, relationships and family-life were affected by the merger as this staff member explained, “I didn’t really think it affected me. But looking back, I was really quite shitty at home for a while. Like if the cat got in my road, it got a boot up the bum and I yelled at him a couple of times, which I never ever do.” This participant agreed, “the impact it has on people’s personal lives is huge because, you know, you can’t not take it home. You have to take it home with you because it’s such a big part of your life.” Another concurred, “does it spill into home? Absolutely. Absolutely. If I’ve had a meeting and it’s something about the merger... I’ll be ranting and raving all the way home... Absolutely moved my stress levels up this year and it’s getting worse, much worse now.”

On a personal note, I recall my little brother feeling the strain of the merger on the night the CCE Council announced its decision to wind down the School of Business. I came home upset, after a few wines with my colleagues where we had re-hashed the events of

the Council meeting, to find my sister-in-law there in plaster with a torn achilles tendon. My other brother was overseas and my parents were out of town, so my little brother was trying to comfort me and take care of my sister-in-law. It made me realise how much my family were affected by what the merger meant to me.

The merger meant a change in friendships too, “I think that at a personal level and I don’t want to be too dramatic about this, I think it’s sort of taken a bit of a toll, or what I feel is a bit of a toll. I mean, [with a friend] we always have lunch and we haven’t had lunch once a week for months now. We get together on the weekend and have a drink and a bit of a yak, but that’s a small way in which it’s [the merger] taken a toll and I really regret that.”

Third, some participants expressed how their confidence had reduced, “I think it’s affected me as a person. I mean, you’re left with huge self-doubt after something like that [disestablishment].” There was also a need to up skill, “you sort of think, well I have to get my skills upgraded because I haven’t used, I’ve only sort of used one [computer] package since I’ve been here in the last 10 years and I’ve lost Word and Excel and I haven’t got the confidence that I had I suppose.”

The merger process also meant variable moods. This staff member admitted they were more likely to be irritable, “yeah, I’m more grumpy. Things get on top of me easier now than they did before, so if something goes wrong I’m more likely to sort of get really annoyed.” Another participant suggested an atmosphere of doom seeped in and affected life outside the workplace, “you tend to find that the general sense of doom or like, I’ve been treated unfairly, starts to create apathy in other areas as well.” One participant recounted their experience with an ex-staff member who still felt personally affected by the merger, which had “spilled over into personal lives, I can think of one person who works a similar job to me but in another institution now who used to work [at one of the merging institutions] who’s very very bitter.”

Fourth, the merger meant a change to people’s career by affecting how some participants felt about the education sector. This participant stated the merger had “certainly changed my, how I feel about my career at the moment. It’s certainly changed how I feel about the sector.” A reaction also shared by this staff member, “it’s been a

push for me. It's not something I would have chosen at this time in my life, but it has propelled me to now be considering a completely different career. So when I finish up here on the 1st of January, I'm going to take my redundancy... I've been totally disillusioned with the education academia, if you like, world, that I'm considering doing something completely different."

Lastly, participants discussed how the merger provoked self-assessment. As described by this staff member, "in any situation where you have to make a change, there's no choice, that's where you are forced to have a look at yourself as a individual, where you are and where you want to go... So I think that's a really good thing because it's a way of forcing us to look at ourselves, and perhaps reassessing where we want to go." Participants also stated they had learned things about themselves such as, "I'm tougher. By that I mean that it's probably helped me to be able to focus on things that I need to focus on and put aside things that I don't need to focus, that aren't my responsibility. So I'm more able to prioritise in those ways. I have become more aware of my strengths and weaknesses."

#### *4.4.5 Workload Changes*

Pragmatically, both management and staff participants believed the merger meant more work for them. Members of management discussed increased working weeks and a need to delegate more, which in turn impacted on the workloads of their staff. Long days and weeks were summed up in comments like, "I mean, I frequently do 11 hour days and when I drive home, I'm spent." And, "it's been enormous amounts of work. I'm probably doing, let me think what I am I doing, 70 hours a week probably on my job and this [merger] at the moment." With a standard New Zealand working day being eight hours and a working week, 40 hours, these experiences are considerably higher. This seems neither sustainable nor productive long-term, as exhausted management are unlikely to perform at their best, which may affect their decision-making abilities as well as their interactions with staff.

Along with increased workloads, management participants also expressed emotional responses such as, "the merger process is a lot more work. It's also, for me emotionally, it's quite hard going" and, due to "the amount of work which is involved at various

points in time and some days you think, oh no, it's just all too hard. Let's just flag the whole thing." Another participant related the merger to claiming part of their life, signalling a sense of lost personal time, "a hell of a lot of work (laughing), two years of my life."

Extended working weeks created a necessity to delegate non-merger work to staff, "it means that some things I would have had involvement in, I haven't this time, so other people have had to pick up that." Yet the merger created demands of its own that increased workloads, "it has an effect because if I'm working on something related to the merger and I need further information from my troops... then they'll be getting more requests for information or help or can you do this sort of stuff. Probably more so than in previous years, so that's put a bit of pressure on them as well." One management participant advised that the increased workload meant their staff received less attention than was ideal, "it's been and it is extraordinarily hard work. It's been time consuming for me and it's on top of my other job, and it means that I've had to not give the attention to some of my [staff] and their needs/direction that I should have done."

Another management participant affirmed that the merger was a great deal of work but felt it was unavoidable because UC would not have wanted CCE to merge with another institution, "from my point of view, of course it's created a huge amount of work actually, and a huge headache, but it's the right thing to do. I suppose from Canterbury's point of view, we wouldn't have wanted anybody else to be merging with the College, so we couldn't have said no." This uninspiring merger statement suggested inevitability about UC and CCE amalgamating and signalled CCE may have had more bargaining power and ability to shape the merger process than they perhaps utilised as UC "couldn't have said no" to the merger. The description of the merger as a "huge headache" implied it was, at least in part, a nuisance rather than a strategic alliance to improve the future of teacher education.

Workload also impacted on management time available for staff and required a deliberate act to facilitate interaction as described here, "I have factored into my diary every week two half hour walkabouts, which is actually really hard to do but that has been something that I have done this year deliberately because I thought if I diarised it, then it just becomes another diary entry, because if I didn't, I'd wouldn't get out of the

office.” It is positive that this participant attempted to increase interaction with staff by walking about the campus. Yet it is likely, that in addition to workload pressures, interactions with disestablished or marginalised staff were challenging. And, as it is natural to avoid difficult situations this may have influenced the allotment of only one hour for such interactions in a 40-70 hour working week.

Staff participants too expressed their workloads had increased with added duties around information provision, planning for proposals, and responses to change proposals, “well personally, it means more work basically,” and “I worked huge hours last year and I couldn’t maintain that... I think that 80 hour weeks would have been standard probably last year. I worked every night.” One participant described their life as work, “it took over my whole life... I mean it wasn’t like that prior to that [merger]. I felt like I got onto a treadmill that I couldn’t get off.” Another participant stated the merger was “too consuming.” These statements implied the merger was overwhelming and constant, leading to exhausted staff interacting with exhausted management.

Increased workloads were partially attributed to staff leaving and illness, “there are less full time staff on board so it means extra duties... and I guess it will get worse... it will just fall back onto a few people. If people are away sick, there’s less people to step in, those sorts of things. Plus, in amongst that, to be continually looking for another job and finding other work.” This added pressure of looking for work was not mentioned by management participants but contributed to pressure felt by staff. And, as tasks were transferred from CCE, UC staff workloads increased, “just quite simply because we’ve taken on the workload from over there [CCE]... it was quite a big thing to suddenly have go out and learn.”

Meetings were also a common occurrence during the merger process that required much time, “there has been increased meetings. And every time you do those, it often generates work to do. So it has increased workload.” This participant advised that their role had changed, “in the short term it probably also means that my, a bigger proportion of my time is going to be taken up with the administration and meetings and planning, and all that adjustment, rather than the actual stuff which I’m here to do, my job.” For this participant merger administration tasks and meetings meant a distraction from what they considered their role to be. And, as another staff member clarified, pre-merger

collaboration was time-consuming because UC was unable to just decree what should be done, “at the moment, we’re still two separate organisations so there’s a limit to, you can’t issue edicts to people at the College.”

#### *4.4.6 Positive Opportunity*

Interview discussions about merger meaning were not all negative; participants also discussed merger “positives” and the “opportunity” of the merger. The change often meant more than one thing to participants and I felt that during interviews people attempted to share both positive and negative experiences as this participant explained, “if you ask what it [the merger] means to me, I fluctuate from being positive and... thinking there’s some new challenges and one of the things we just learn to do is find new ways forward to make things work, and at other times a sense of wishing it wasn’t going to happen and disillusionment, disappointment.” This fluctuation of merger meaning likely contributed to an underlying organisational atmosphere of instability.

Situations attributed with positive meanings in the merger included the prospect of a challenge and an opportunity to learn about the process, “all it really is to me is a new challenge. That’s the only way I can really look at it. I think to stay positive, it’s just part of destiny of the way things are going and it’s the opportunity of learning how this process works. Who knows who of us will have to deal with it again in the future.” As this participant observed, “for me also on a more positive side, parts of it [the merger] have been quite, technically quite satisfying. It’s challenged me in a way that hasn’t challenged me for quite a while. I don’t know, I found that quite stimulating.”

Another participant agreed the challenge was positive but implied it was the only merger positive, “probably the only high point for me, is that it is a challenge. It is bringing on new things so it is the opportunity to experience the whole thing and maybe learn from it.” Another positive note shared about the merger, was described as “in the positive aspect, it is a chance to, at least one interesting thing I’ll find is, I’ll have managed to be with the merger from the start to the end. And that will be interesting to see actually how things end up. But that’s about the only interesting thing I could say about it really.” That some participants needed to search for positives about the merger suggested a sub-text of negativity towards the change experience.

Similar to staff, this management member considered the merger a positive challenge, “it’s been a challenge, an interesting challenge, and I guess I think there will be a good result.” In comparison with staff, management participants more easily discussed merger positives such as, “on a positive side, there will be great benefits and so on, it will be a much stronger alignment between big ideas and putting it into practice, the sort of theory practice nexus that they talk about.” Another management participant felt the merger meant excitement, “having worked alongside those leading the planning from the earliest stage and leading the implementation of it, I think it’s incredibly exciting. I think the new College of Education will be a really exciting development and I think once it gets beyond it’s newborn stage, it will be wonderful watching it unfold and I think it will make a huge contribution to the University overall because of it’s points of difference.”

Meaning making also involved discussions about opportunity at both an organisational and personal level. At the organisational level the merger meant improved financial power and economies of scale as this management participant observed, in “a small to medium institution, you can think wonderful things of the way you do things, but there’s no doubt that the potential and opportunities are there with a larger system to do some things quite differently and very well indeed, and there’s certainly potential for delivering more with the money because economies of scale and just the expertise you can draw on.” Staff also made comments at an organisational level such as, “they’re [CCE] a significant volume and size. So for us and resources, it’s, like it’s quite a challenge to be able to bring that volume and size into the way that we do things,” and “to me it means, I guess the opportunity to offer a high level of service on both campuses. Certainly a much higher degree of collaboration.”

At the individual level, this management participant believed the merger offered great personal opportunities to people who wanted to engage, “I think the merger means at a strategic level, some tremendous opportunities for the University and for those people at the College of Education who want to engage with the way forward.” The caveat here, that merger opportunities existed only for those who wanted to engage, seemed simplistic. Further, does this comment imply that all disestablished staff, who by inference were not offered “tremendous opportunities,” did not want to “engage with



the way forward?” Being a staff member whose position was disestablished, I find this comment a little condescending and believe it shows a disconnection between management and staff merger views.

Other members of management agreed the merger meant personal opportunity for both people who accepted positions in the merged institution and those who left. First, people who stayed after the merger would benefit from being exposed to broader opportunities and skills, “there’s also quite a lot of people, who think that this is good and there’s an opportunity for them and it means they can join an organisation which is broader and has a different range of opportunities for them.” Second, those who left would benefit from embarking on new opportunities, “so I think people who decide to leave, or are made redundant and have to take some other steps, there can be some real wins there also.” However, it was recognised that not all staff leaving would necessarily consider such a change meant a great opportunity, “I think there will inevitably be, based on patterns of organisational change, a small number of staff who leave badly and who carry the disintegration with them, rather than this sort of propelling them into something new.” More management participants than staff members, shared comments suggesting the merger was an opportunity, which implied staff saw less prospects than what management believed existed.

#### *4.4.7 Supercharged Atmosphere*

An outcome from an environment where the merger meant loss, disestablishment, and heavy workloads, was a supercharged atmosphere. The existence of such an atmosphere is best illustrated through an example, for which I will use the 2005 CCE staff Christmas lunch. During interviews CCE participants often referred to the Christmas lunch as a low point in the merger process. Yet UC colleagues were also aware of the incident as this staff member told me, “one hears all sorts of, I mean I remember hearing about the episode at the end of the year party or whatever, last year, where the song was sung or whatever was done... a skit was done... ah [sighs in sympathy].” Their sympathetic sigh, I believe, was intended for all the parties involved, i) the performer, and ii) the staff upset by the act. To a large extent this reaction embodied how most participants felt about the incident.

The day of the 2005 CCE staff Christmas lunch, December 16, was warm and sunny. I recall staff looked forward to relaxing on the campus lawn with colleagues over a drink and lunch. Many staff suspected this would be their last CCE Christmas party and saw it as an opportunity to catch-up before the inevitable merger staff exodus. For the School of Business this event was a goodbye as the CCE Council had passed a resolution the previous month to wind down the School. CCE library staff had also faced dramatic change from their implementation plan presented a few days prior to the party, which included a reduction in staff. Hence, it was a difficult time for library and School of Business employees. I also believe that the change inflicted on these two areas meant staff outside the two groups had begun to realise the merger was real and would likely impact them. For these reasons, the 2005 Christmas lunch meant more to staff than it had in previous years and tensions ran high.

One of the party entertainment acts was a skit performed by a member of senior management. The topic of the skit was the merger process and, as was explained later that afternoon in an “all CCE” email defending the performer, the “intended targets [were] TEC, TAMU, and the government who have precipitated the unfortunate events of the year. This was a satire designed to poke the borax where it was deserved.” Yet given the context of the Christmas party the skit was poorly received by participants who felt it meant, “a senior member of staff [making] a mockery of the School of Business demise,” and “it was meant to be funny but it was very bad taste,” so that it “felt like you were being kicked while you were down,” and left this participant thinking “it was just absolutely disgusting.” This event cumulated in School of Business, and other, staff walking out of the Christmas lunch in protest, mid-skit, and an angry “all CCE” email being sent that stated, “today despite my imminent status of unemployment I attended the last formal function as an employee of the Christchurch College of Education – for what??? To be insulted publicly in front of my “esteemed” colleagues! You obviously are ignorant to the dynamics of the process that my colleagues... and myself have been enduring for the last 12 months.” This email conveyed feelings of uncertainty through “imminent status of unemployment”, offence “insulted publicly”, and suffering “my colleagues... and myself have been enduring.” The effect of the skit on colleagues was visible, as described by this participant, “all I know is it had devastating results for some of our staff here, they were very upset and distraught.”

So why did this skit cause such an emotional reaction? It seemed participants believed that the satire was a reflection of management's view of the process, which was dramatically different to the staff view. This disparity between management and staff perceptions was described as being "on a different page" of the merger story and was considered the cause of the skit's fallout by this participant, "and what you've got to wonder about is, did management know that [the performer] was going to put on this play?... And if management knew what it was going to be about and they didn't consider it inappropriate, are management either perhaps on a different page from us and they did think it was amusing, or did management just not really care if we were upset." It is unlikely senior management were involved with the social club entertainment programme and hence they, with the exception of the performer, may have been as surprised as staff by the skit's content.

Other participants shared the view that the skit reflected management ignorance rather than malice, "I feel that that skit may have been reflecting a personal view of what we were going through from the management's perspective as opposed to our perspective. So I sincerely don't think that the person is a nasty person." As agreed by this staff member, "I don't think there was meanness or nastiness there. I don't think they were trying to do that. I genuinely think they thought they were being funny and I mean some aspects of the skit were true but there was a whole other side to the experience for the people in the School of Business that just wasn't there and, yeah."

On the whole, staff believed management were out of touch as this comment indicated, "I just don't think that management had a clue and why, I don't know. It was just, you know, I don't know why [the performer] got it so wrong. Well, [they] never thought about it. [The performer] didn't think about what [they] was doing." And that the performer's intention showed a lack of understanding of the staff experience, "well I have heard on the grapevine that supposedly [they] thought the play was kind of showing solidarity... we don't believe we've had much sort of solidarity from the Council nor the rest of the College." Another participant agreed and shared their disappointment, "what it showed to me was the, I was really disappointed that a senior colleague had swallowed the propaganda so fully and had then decided to go and present a skit on the basis that the propaganda was fact... it totally lacked balance."

These quotes illustrated the recipients of the merger, the staff, perceived merger events differently to those in charge of the merger, management. For staff expressed that management did not know “what we were going through” or understand the “whole other side to the experience,” that is, how it felt to be a recipient.

One participant informed me that they had been told the performer “had no idea that we were looking at being out of jobs and that the School of Business wasn’t going to be sold or bought by the University or anybody else... and I thought, wow if you’re on the Executive and you don’t know what’s going on, you shouldn’t be making decisions at those meeting and voting when you haven’t got all the information.” The CCE Council meeting that decreed to wind down the School of Business was held on November 16, one month prior to the Christmas lunch. If indeed this member of senior management did not realise the implication of how that decision related to staff jobs it showed a disturbing lack of communication between the management team, and a deficient appreciation of merger impacts and staff disestablishment anxiety.

Another reason attributed to the turbulent misunderstanding of the skit was that its timing was inappropriate given staff had been so recently affected. As this participant believed, “well, it was inappropriate, inappropriate place and time for it to happen. If they [management] want to do that, let them do that in some little academic staff meeting that they’re having because I just didn’t think it was on and it made everyone feel uncomfortable and for you guys, the School of Business, I think at that time all the shit was happening and bad taste, bad taste.” Another participant also appreciated that the timing showed a lack of empathy for affected staff, “I think it was a very precious situation at the time. Okay, it was meant to be humorous and people that weren’t, at that time being affected by the merger would have found it humorous. It was light-hearted. But people that had, on the School of Business side of things, people that had directly been affected only very recently, would have still a lot of emotions and maybe a few months down the track, would have been able to look at it and seen it as humour. But it was incredibly bad timing, I think.”

Management participants suggested a lack of empathy and judgement were explanations for the skit through comments such as these, it “showed a lack of judgement,” “everybody’s got a quirky sort of sense of humour I suppose, and I guess [they] just saw

it from [their] perspective and again failed to put [themselves] in the shoes of someone from either the School of Business or the Library,” and “it was inappropriate. It was insensitive. It was the wrong skit for the wrong occasion.” I recall, after leaving the Christmas lunch that the Principal came over to the School of Business and apologised, where he was confronted with angry and upset staff. Personally, I felt sad seeing my colleagues upset again after an emotional month, and angry that the party had ended so badly, tarnishing yet another College memory.

Ultimately, most staff recognised that the performer did not intend to upset anyone and was not a “nasty” person. Evidenced, as I understand, by the performer regretting the misunderstanding and hurt caused by the skit, and offering to apologise to all School of Business (and possibly library) staff individually. However, participants did believe the performer, and management, were out of touch with staff, which caused this lack of empathy and judgement. And, in the context of recent merger events the skit was ill-timed. Overall the supercharged atmosphere of the merger led to the CCE Christmas lunch skit being misinterpreted. Staff thought the skit was insensitive and made light of their circumstances. Intending the skit as a joke, the management performer did not mean any harm but as they were out of touch with staff they did not anticipate, and therefore avoid, the emotional fallout which ensued.

#### *4.4.8 Meaning Making Conclusion*

Meaning making in the merger was a complex process affected by personal experiences and emotion. The recipients of the change, staff, attributed different meanings to the merger than management did, who were directing the change. This difference in merger meaning was illustrated through a staff belief that disestablishment was a personal and negative message, yet management felt it was an opportunity to do something new. Staff were also surprised by the number of positions disestablished rather than transferred, whereas management considered the change proposal process to be fair and transparent. The change proposal delivery process also showed a disconnection between staff and management, and for some CCE participants the delivery of disestablishment news when surrounded by UC staff meant management lacked empathy.

A difference in meaning making between management and staff was also visible in the supercharged atmosphere of the CCE Christmas lunch. The skit resulted in staff feeling misunderstood and estranged, while illustrating that management were out of touch and lacked judgement about the repercussions of the performance.

Yet the merger did not mean exclusively one thing to participants. Some participants considered the merger a positive challenge, or a personal or organisational opportunity, while others mourned the loss of jobs, colleagues, autonomy, and institutional identity. On an individual level the merger also meant changed relationships, reduced confidence, variable moods, and self-assessment.

Next, I discuss the language of change used in this merger process.

#### 4.5 *Language of Change*

“War is what happens when language fails” - Margaret Atwood

(<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/language.html>,

retrieved 25 September, 2007)

The way people express themselves, the words they choose, are more than a means to convey information. Language is a clue that reveals deeper meanings, sub-plots, and how the person feels about what they are saying. Throughout the process of conducting interviews I was repeatedly struck by the common language participants adopted when sharing their experiences with me. That language is best described as one of war, its vocabulary associated with violence and strategy, which revealed the merger was like a battle. The interviews also exposed a second, albeit less obvious, change in everyday language that involved re-naming people implicated in the merger as well as the merger process itself. I will discuss the war language of change first.

##### 4.5.1 *War*

Were the merger participants at war? Listening to them describe changes attributed to the merger it became apparent the merger felt like being in a war-zone. The analogy with war suggests battles, victims, pain, troops, leaders, and a winner-loser situation as one side usually emerges victorious.

In the words of one general staff participant, “a part of it is the relentlessness, you go on and on and on and it’s been 18 months now and it’s very tiring. I can imagine how people feel in a war-zone, you know, you feel like it’s never-ending. Yeah, and it feels a bit like a war-zone.” Using a passionate word such as “relentlessness” implied no respite or escape, suggesting staff felt fatigued and were suffering due to a drawn out process. Management agreed that the process was too long but attributed blame to government delays such as, “I mean the slowness of our advance has really been at Government level. They just obviously are not interested in the College of Education.” Another management participant expressed “relief. Thank God those useless bastards have got off their backside and actually approved this merger officially now (laughing).” Some government-level delays were anticipated and expected to impact on

the merger process, for 2005 was an election year. Yet neither of these management informants sound as weary of the merger relentlessness as the staff participant did.

Another staff participant drew an analogy with the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, a conflict that killed over a thousand people and severely damaged Lebanese infrastructure and displaced many Lebanese and Israelis ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006\\_Israel-Lebanon\\_conflict](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_Israel-Lebanon_conflict), retrieved 17 July, 2007). “Like all these Lebanese bombings and buildings that have been destroyed, and I sort of think, well I can sort of, you have a sense of loss that these people have built their homes, built their lives and people have come and destroyed it, and to some extent that’s what’s happened here... We’re proud of what we’ve done and through Government directives, political manoeuvrings within the sector here in Christchurch, people have destroyed it. And that’s sad.” This quotation reveals two interesting points. First, for many of us work is a sacred part of our lives, we invest time and effort in our careers and work hard to up-skill, and as such our job is part of our identity. This participant was “proud of what we’ve done” but due to the merger was faced with a new reality where their work identity had been destroyed, resulting in a sense of loss and displacement. This is a life changing event, and like a war, is out of their individual control, hence cultivating a sense of sadness and defeat. Second, there is an element of intrigue present as they believed tactical government and political forces were at work performing “political manoeuvrings” to plot this destruction. On a deeper level, this disclosed that the participant felt “a sense of loss” for their work and lifestyle and a sense of treachery, even a lack of trust, towards those in charge of the merger and perhaps the sector.

Yet war terminology was not reserved solely to describe merger processes. This language was also chosen by a participant to describe a low point for them, “the [UC] College of Arts restructuring and kind of various other assaults by senior management on the sort of collegial ethos of the University.” This merger recipient viewed management as forging attacks on UC’s culture via restructuring, suggesting an unstable and distrustful of change environment existed prior to the merger. Again using the language of war, another participant shared a similar sentiment about UC’s restructuring, which they later extended to the merger. “Because I am part of the UC School of Education, which was targeted in the College of Arts restructuring I think that [restructure] process, alongside the merger process, it doesn’t matter to UC what the



different circumstances are, but the things happening to people are the same, for example not being kept in the loop.” This person felt management had “targeted” their School and was proceeding to use similar strategies in the merger process to that used in their restructure, which would result in staff exclusion.

Both management and staff participants used language to suggest they were involved in merger battles. Sometimes they were fighting together and at other times, against each other. One CCE management participant explained they had “battled” to secure the option for staff on fixed-term (non-permanent) contracts to apply for jobs that arose during the merger process. It was a “struggle initially to ensure that those who were under contract, they had signed up for a contract until December, and that seemed to preclude them from applying for jobs, but we battled to make sure that that wasn’t the case and we’ve had that overturned. So that’s a bit of a, little bit of a victory.” What is not clear is who they had to fight to achieve this victory, perhaps the battle was with a particular change policy or other members of senior management however, the outcome is considered a win, something this management participant felt good about, and a happy outcome also for contract staff.

Another CCE management battle was explained as a clash of priorities, “the constant battle of having to try and get the important decisions, the important events in front of the right people. I mean, for one Records and Enrolments is a good example. All they wanted to do at the university of course, is to get the right number of people trained in Jade [Student Management System] to enrol students for 2007 and that is very important that they do that. All we want to do from our side is to make sure that we had the right staff to carry out graduation at the end of this year and the two things are not compatible.” This quote used the war language of change by referring to the different priorities as a “battle,” while “constant” implied this was a recurring problem between merger management teams. Further, “our side” indicates UC and CCE management did not always believe they were on the same side.

For the UC School of Education staff the merger battle involved territory. They were faced with moving from the UC campus to the CCE campus once the two institutions merged, which one staff participant described as the “biggest low point for me was losing the battle over where we would be located and being told that we had to move

across to current Christchurch College of Education buildings.” This territory defeat meant uncertainty, and a loss of daily activities and affiliations, “most of my research, and professional interaction requires me to be here [UC] not over there [CCE]. What would I do over there, no in fact, I don’t know what I would do over there. All my research will be here, professional contacts will be over here and I’ll be way over there. And you can’t, it’s too far to walk to do a there and back. I mean, you’ve got 40 minutes out of your day.” Another participant agreed they would miss the contact facilitated by location, “this is what I will miss when I go to the other [CCE] campus, bumping into people and doing some business between the Registry and here.”

A UC management participant was more positive about such a move, “I don’t mind moving across there [to the CCE campus]. But on the other hand, it’s sort of mildly upsetting in the sense that my sort of familiar patterns will be somewhat disrupted. I won’t bump into colleagues from other departments of the university, the walk from here along the asphalt path past the gum trees to the library that will all go.” Similar to UC staff complaints, this participant admitted they would miss the interaction and networking facilitated by location.

UC staff also questioned how locating the new UCCE on a different campus would assist with its integration into the university, “the other thing is that I think, that one of the challenges for the new College of Education overall is that it’s going to be a second class citizen among the other colleges, and it’s going to take a lot of work to integrate it into the University. And so, the last College to be plonked somewhere else should be the College of Education. Strategically it’s a major error. They [management] would have been much better off to relocate some other part of the University over there, the College of Arts, the College of Science, any other College actually than the College of Education.” In contrast, a CCE management participant told me that they would not feel happy moving to the UC campus, which they perceived as a bleak, lonely place where social interactions are sparse; “move to the University site and some of those sort of bleak buildings and, I know sometimes when I walk along those corridors, that the environment that we have here where it’s much more open door, and you can sort of stick your head out the corridor and chat, I don’t find in some of those buildings over there. I wouldn’t be looking forward to it.”

One UC staff participant expressed a different view on the territory battle with, “I think we’ll be much much better off. We, in my opinion, we’re housed in the campus slum. This is one of the oldest buildings. The only thing that’s ever been done to it is a paint job about five or six years ago, we’ve progressively lost our classrooms to central bookings. Staying here would not be as good as moving to a new campus where I think there will be more space, better classrooms, so I’m not worried at all.” This positive view of the move is seen as an opportunity to improve the working environment by leaving behind the “slum” and lost battles over classrooms. Yet this positive opinion is tempered by the proviso that UC School of Education would not be the sole regiment to move to CCE campus. “Shifting physically isn’t a real problem, provided that other departments and programmes are shifted over there as well. If it just becomes education, with an emphasis on teacher education, it will be an outpost and sort of forgotten, an out of sight out of mind sort of thing.” This statement suggested feelings of banishment to the CCE campus, isolation, and a fear that once there they would be forgotten.

Of course, wars are not won on the battlefield alone. The hearts and minds of the people are needed to sustain momentum and resources for conflict, which are captured by communicating the war effort message. A communication mechanism available to both CCE staff and management was the “all-CCE” email address. However, in January 2006 staff were reminded of the policy pertaining to the use of this email, as explained in this email extract from the CCE Principal. “The policy statement and guidelines are clear: the “all cce” email facility exists to advance the day-to-day work of the College... It is also not to be used to express personal views on College issues, decisions, or personnel. The statement notes that: *Broadcast emails, to email mailing lists (e.g. all cce), must be used for official messages for maintaining effective operation of the College* [italics in source email]... The policy with guidelines is attached and I ask that all staff members are familiar with it - particularly during this time of change and the inevitable stress and tension that accompanies the change. Staff members need to be aware that breaches of the policy and guidelines have been and will continue to be addressed with individuals concerned where breaches occur. Breaches may result in disciplinary action. The reason for this is also clear: College policies must be followed – the more so in times of change” (McMahon, 2006). Staff understood this message to mean they were banned from using this communication channel to express their views on the merger and to say goodbye to colleagues or disciplinary action would result.

Non-policy compliant “all CCE” email activities had been occurring for some time prior to this email from the Principal.

This “ban” meant a variety of things to staff. Described using the war language of change it was: i) a management control mechanism, ii) a restriction of freedom, and iii) an effort to create a management propaganda channel. First, it was considered “a way of management keeping the staff under control and not making life difficult for them [management].” This implied a perception that management felt challenged by staff and instead of responding to the challenge, banned staff use of the channel. Being able to make and enforce bans also demonstrated management power over staff. Another participant explained that “it’s in line with classic restructuring or a change in management, where change is difficult and to try and nullify damages or keep the troops in line type of thing.” This suggested the ban was seen as an effort to limit strikes on the official/management merger message through restricting access to information channels.

Another intimation of control was that it was a way to keep the peace, not “stir other people up,” while attempting to protect staff morale. This participant felt the ban “perhaps was done to prevent people from saying things that would not only be damaging to morale, but might stir other people up, [for example] I think we’re all going to be under resourced and it [the email] would be a grievance list. And again, that would have been doubly damaging for morale, because not only are people sad that someone’s leaving but that they’re sad because they’re thinking of staying in an organisation that’s going downhill really fast or going down the toilet on turbo flush. And so I suspect that’s why they [management] did it, because they felt that it would have been just too damaging to morale of those staff who were staying behind.” This idea that management were protecting staff was dismissed by another participant who believed from a staff point of view “the only issue with the all CCE saying goodbye thing [is] not everyone knows everyone. So you’re getting this emotional goodbye from someone you’ve never met. But who cares, you can just quickly hit delete, and it’s still also, even if you didn’t know them, it still gives you an awareness of the amount of people that are leaving for instance.” These statements suggest a staff perception that management were attempting to control information such as, the numbers of staff

leaving, because the truth may stir people up or be damaging on morale for those staff remaining at the institution.

Second, restricting the use of “all CCE” email was seen as a reduction in staff freedom and implied management did not want to hear the staff voice unless it was on their terms. “What a load of crap. That is once again, why don’t they give staff members a bit of credit. No, I just think that that’s [the ban’s] wrong.” Another staff member agreed, “I think that that’s just another way to shut us up actually. I think that ban came about, I know of two instances where a general email was sent out and senior management didn’t like the tone of that... From there all of a sudden a ban on CCE, so you can’t tell me that it’s not related to, I think it’s just part and parcel of their management technique to shut us up and keep us shut up. Keep people in the dark. Because it suits them [management] to send an all wide email, doesn’t it about all sorts of things.” A degree of hypocrisy is seen here, staff can not use this channel to discuss the merger but management can. This participant also believed management were not interested in hearing what staff have to say and instead wished to “keep us shut up.” As lamented by one participant “we’re not allowed to use that as a means of getting our thoughts and ideas across.”

Third, staff considered the ban to be a way to create a management propaganda channel. As one participant expressed, “I think that is pathetic, it’s a nonsense. I liken that to what happened in the US in World War II and they used documentaries and film as a propaganda machine for the Government. When you control the information flows, I think it’s a dangerous thing and I think it’s an unhealthy thing. We’re not letting any bad news out there. No one’s allowed to know who’s been made redundant. Nobody’s allowed to know whose left and why they are leaving.” When asked about this ban, a management participant corrected me with “it wasn’t a ban. It just had to be used for the right purpose according to the long-standing College policy.” However, they conceded that the policy differed to current usage and that staff had been using the “all CCE” email for things outside the policy for some time.

This management participant went on to explain the “all CCE” email use was modified “because we had a situation last year where people were using the all CCE email to make political comments on either the restructuring or the merger when there were

other fora made available to do that. I mean, we've got questions and answers on the website for example. I mean, the avenues were all there and so it was... inappropriate for the all CCE email to be used in that connection, when [management] bend over backwards to try and provide avenues for people to do that... [I] didn't want people to be receiving emails with political messages... that's very intrusive and it wasn't part of what we had set out to do... We didn't restrict access, we just asked people to make sure that their email messages were fit for the purpose." Perhaps this participant felt frustrated by the situation they referred to last year as they believed management had made an effort to "bend over backwards" to achieve communication "avenues for staff." However, that staff chose to communicate outside of these "avenues" suggested management's communication structure was not considered appropriate by staff.

That management did not "restrict access" is technically true, CCE staff access to the email address was not removed yet, there were repercussions for not following orders and staff members who breached policy were disciplined. As this management participant confirmed "if someone breaches it, I speak to the person or ask a senior manager to speak to the person or ask HR to speak to the person, whatever's relevant for the particular situation." It is interesting that this participant believed staff usage of this channel to send political messages was intrusive, yet management were comfortable regularly emailing their own merger message to "all CCE." I realise it is unusual for staff to have access to a channel like this (UC staff did not have a similar means of communication), but it was a part of the CCE culture and constraining usage and disciplining non-conformists during the change period was considered a restriction of freedom and perhaps heralded the first of many culture changes the merger would bring.

Another management participant explained how they agreed with the ban, "I think the ban happens to work for us at the moment because I don't think we kind of need a lot of the raw emotion to be broadcast institution-wide. By saying that I don't mean that I think staff should not be able to talk to one another, or voice their opinions, it's just the way that it's done and the means by which it is done and I don't think that all CCE's are desirable for that purpose." Here management refer to the enforcement of College policy regarding "all CCE" emails as a ban, illustrating it was not just staff who interpreted this restriction as a ban. However, it is possible the use of this word may have been caused by the participant emulating my words as interviewer. This participant

does not object to staff voicing their opinions they just believe staff should not be able to “broadcast institution-wide.” Perhaps this is because such staff broadcasts may rally public/organisational opinion and incite efforts to change the situation. Or a less sinister suggestion would be that management feel paternal and do not want the wider staff group exposed to “raw emotion” as that may be upsetting for staff, although I do not believe it is possible to shelter staff from emotion during the merger process.

Yet not all management participants accepted the ban as the best course of action, as one shared “well, I can understand why, I mean, we’ve had that sort of thing before. It’s like a forest fire, it gets totally out of control if there’s an interesting topic. If, I guess from the point of view of the staff though, they just feel like they’ve been a little bit muzzled. I don’t think banning anything is the answer, it’s too schoolish for me.” This management participant shows an understanding of the staff viewpoint and recognises that they would feel restricted, “muzzled,” by such a ban. However, they do agree there was a need for managing staff expression to prevent a “forest fire” of public debate getting “totally out of control.” They also comment the ban was “too schoolish,” which likely refers to CCE Principal’s previous experience as a High School Principal.

These responses show a disconnection between recipients of the ban and management enforcing the ban. Management felt they provided enough avenues for people to express themselves but staff use of the “all CCE” email implied otherwise. If staff believed appropriate opportunities for expression existed surely they would not have been using the email channel. Perhaps, through this ban management missed an opportunity to hear what staff had to say and to respond to staff comments and concerns via this medium. Management have little chance of replying to or correcting concerns raised via gossip or hushed comments because they would not have exposure to those channels. Clearly, management and staff experiences here differ. Staff were not able to make “political comments” or say goodbye and were required to adhere to policy for “all CCE” email use. Yet, management regularly used this as a channel for their communication such as, weekly change activity updates.

#### 4.5.2 *Re-naming*

The second aspect visible in the language of change was the tendency to re-name people associated with the merger. Changing someone's name is changing their identity, and the respect and/or authority bestowed on them. The new name chosen implied how participants were feeling about the person they re-named.

The CCE figurehead of the merger, the College Principal, was crowned with more than one new name. In one interview he was described as "Roy's boy," Roy being the UC Vice Chancellor. A sentiment shared by another participant who explained the Principal's recently announced appointment as Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC) of the new UC College of Education meant "it's obvious that was his reward." Another participant agreed, "I'm obviously not the only person that thinks that he's sold the College for 30 pieces of silver, I'm sure of it. I'm sure I can't be sitting here in this office the only person thinking [he] was offered this Pro Vice Chancellorship in return for facilitating a favourable merger." The Principal's PVC appointment was construed as a reward for doing a good job in the eyes of UC. But "Roy's boy" tells us even more than that. It implied the Principal was seen by staff as UC's puppet that he didn't have any power and that he had aligned his loyalties with UC not CCE.

Yet what affronted one participant most was the Principal's previous denial of his personal future job opportunities, "if he hadn't made this denial, then it's like you could accept that perhaps he acted in his own best interests. Because I think a lot of people try and act in their own best interests. But the fact that you deny, and then it is true that kind of makes it worse, I think." The deeper meaning here is that management words need to be congruent with deeds, the participant believed this senior management member's denial was dishonest and that they acted, at least in part, in their own interest.

A similar situation arose when an article about the merger appeared in *The Press* newspaper on Saturday, August 19. It stated that "decisions on the future of staff positions, including his [the Principals] own, would be made in the next few months" (Bennetts, 2006, p. A5). Then on Monday August 21, 2006 UC's Vice Chancellor announced the Principal's appointment as PVC. A management participant described this timing as, "unfortunate, but I guess it was always going to be, it's just a case of



biting the bullet, whatever the timing was, it was going to be a little bit unfortunate. Whenever I see that, it's so similar to Ricky Gervais in "The Office" [an English sitcom], when he called his staff together and said there's good news and there's bad news. The bad news is that we're merging and most of you are going to lose your jobs and the good news is that I've got a position in management. This was so similar to that." The timing here is unfortunate as the article reported the Principal's future, along with staff, was uncertain on Saturday, yet his PVC appointment was announced on Monday. This timing may have undermined the sincerity of communications from management to staff.

The analogy to Ricky Gervais is unflattering for management but the comment highlighted that there would never be a "good" time in the eyes of staff to confirm a senior management appointment while many staff jobs were being disestablished. This also illustrated a difference in merger experience between those in charge of the merger, management, who were securing or being offered positions in the new environment, and the recipients of the merger, staff, who were losing their positions. Interestingly, the Principal left the UC College of Education PVC position in March 2007, which perhaps supports pre-merger declarations that he did not have a long-term future as PVC.

In another act of renaming, when expressing their disapproval for the ban on staff using the "all CCE" email, one participant stated it was like "we aren't going to let any opinions out there that are different to the opinions of those of the Fuhrer." This name is consistent with the war language of change but drawing an analogy with Hitler, suggested an intense dislike for this ban. A dislike transposed to the Principal who because of this act was renamed as a dictator who censors information.

Even the merger itself was renamed. In one email sent to "all CCE" by a staff member the merger was referred to as "absorption." When I asked the staff member why they had used that term they explained, "it is an absorption... I'm not a weasel words person... now, it's an absorption. No one kids themselves it's anything but an absorption at operational level. And if management wishes to take an issue with us on that, then they may cheerfully do so. I will use words that I think are appropriate. I will not use management speak." The message here is clear, staff did not believe the situation was a merger, and that management's suggestion and sustained use of the term

“merger” was considered “management speak” or “weasel words” rather than the truth. This is a view shared by many staff participants as these comments illustrate: “I don’t believe it’s a merger, I’ve never believed it’s a merger. It’s purely a takeover situation”; “this is not a merger it’s a takeover by the University of Canterbury”; and “they talked about it being, we’ll take the best of both organisations. But everybody knows it’s a whole lot of crap.”

UC staff also believed CCE staff would consider the merger process to be a takeover, “I think the effort has been made to merge rather than to takeover. Although it would still, I’m quite sure it will still feel more like a takeover to those people who are being taken over. Being merged. (laughing).” With this little slip, the participant says CCE are “being taken over” before correcting their comment to “being merged,” which suggested UC staff also considered the merger to be a takeover of CCE. Another UC staff participant explained, “the College feel like it’s a takeover I’d imagine... I wonder if it would have been better to be much more blunt and honest, because it would, because it [using the term merger] might set up false expectations with people.” This participant suggests “merger” is not the best term for the union because people may wrongly anticipate a merger process (rather than a takeover) to ensue, implying they believed this was a takeover situation.

Even management participants seemed to doubt the sincerity of the term “merger.” One explained, “the reality of life is that the other institution goes out of existence and that’s where it is and while people talk about merger, if you’re in a business scene, it’s not really a merger, it’s really actually a takeover, a disestablishment process and that’s kind of a hard reality for some people to get their heads around.” Another participant was quite certain, “we’ve got to actually be blunt about this thing. It’s actually not a new institution being created from two. It’s a takeover. We’re just not allowed to call it that.” A CCE management participant suggested the process was not strictly a merger, “because we have to change more than they do,” and another clarified that “the University’s culture will predominate.” Given that both management and staff participants expressed a belief the institutions union was a takeover not a merger, it seems dishonest to not officially have renamed the process to an acquisition.

I also was not immune to this re-naming tendency. In September 2006 I was contacted by a person who had been contracted to the College to perform a periphery role associated with the closure of the College (as a distinct entity) due to the imminent merger. They asked for mine, and my School of Business colleagues' views, saying they were interested in "the way people think about the merger." I did not provide any views, yet this person emailed me a number of times, once saying "I sat eating my lunch puzzling about what possible reason people could come up with for the College's not proceeding with the sale of the Business School. Suddenly the obvious answer came to me, in a flash of illumination: the silly buggers will think that it was [UC Vice Chancellor], driving a hard bargain on behalf of the university, and wanting to kill off competition! I'll bet that was what you told yourselves, wasn't it? It's an almost plausible explanation, but unfortunately not the true one." Given that I did not know this person, they were not involved with the merger, and did not work at CCE or UC, labelling me and my colleagues as "silly buggers" was unwelcome to say the least.

However, this re-naming incident illustrated to me that people external to the merger were also forming views about the events unfolding. As I was undertaking my merger research during that time using an emic (insider) approach, I was incredulous that this person felt they possessed an accurate understanding of the merger, the "one true" version of events, while being external to the situation. When I queried the sources leading to these conclusions they referred me to CCE Council meeting minutes, which I had already read and I had attended most Council meetings held in 2006. Later they also told me their sources included, "the [CCE Council] minutes, and pretty searching interviews with both [a CCE Senior Management member] and [another CCE Senior Management member]." They confessed they "haven't sighted a copy of the actual communication from the TEC [Tertiary Education Commission]." I remain unconvinced that there is one "truth" for any event in this merger and that even if there was, interviewing only two individuals, both management, would not illuminate such a truth.

#### *4.5.3 Language of Change Conclusion*

Overall, the language of change suggested this merger was a battle and that participating in it felt like being in a war-zone. Some battles occurred over process and others over territory. The language used also highlighted a division between the recipients of change, the staff, and management controlling the change. This is most apparent with the ban on staff using the “all CCE” email, which staff interpreted as i) a management control mechanism, ii) a restriction of freedom, and iii) the creation of a management propaganda channel. Management felt the restriction was necessary and that other communication avenues existed that staff should use instead.

The second change in language, where “new” names were attributed to people or to the merger itself, signalled unhappiness and dissatisfaction. The change process was perceived by management and staff as a takeover, which implied a pointlessness and even dishonesty about continuing to use the term “merger.” Whereas names such as, “Roy’s boy,” “Fuhrer,” and making comparisons with “Ricky Gervais” were unflattering and indicated disappointment with merger leadership. It seemed in this merger battle, both staff and management used language to convey the conflict present in this change process.

In the next section, I explore expression of emotions during the merger process and how this influenced behaviour.

#### 4.6 *Emotion*

“In intensity of feeling... not in statistics, lies the power to move the world”

- Charles Booth (Boyle, 2000, p. 127)

There was no shortage of intense feeling during the pre-merger phase, which manifested both in- and out- side the workplace. Emotions varied based on how individuals were affected at different times. For most people, an intense period occurred when a change proposal for their area was released, which largely coincided with the period when I conducted one-to-one interviews. Participants didn't just talk about how they felt during the interviews, from some there was an outpouring of emotions: for example, two participants cried. However, the emotional intensity was not limited to participants. I also found the interviews emotionally draining as I was personally affected by the process and empathised with the participants. In addition, these encounters seemed to bring my emotions to the surface and left my feelings raw. In this section I will discuss the emotions participants shared during their interviews, along with the changes in behaviour these emotions brought.

Even participants who appeared less emotive than others during their interview shared out-of-character behaviour. One such participant recounted a day when “all CCE” staff had received an email from the Principal sent by his PA and how that made them feel “pissed off” enough to reply to the PA saying “tell [the Principal] I have received his email.” This participant possibly felt that by not sending his own emails, the Principal had distanced himself from staff and created a barrier between them. Although not a major workplace incident, this is illustrative of the emotional atmosphere that contributed to any action potentially being misinterpreted and responded to in an unproductive way. Many such incidents from a variety of people lead to an emotionally charged and overall less productive workplace.

In the following sections we review the expression of emotions through effects on personal relationships and use as an act of defiance. Emotion conveyed through violent analogies, uncertainty, and concern for others is also explored, along with the intensity of emotion present in the merger process.

#### *4.6.1 Personal Relationships*

A number of participants agreed that emotion takes a toll not just on the person experiencing it but on those around them. This participant shared that “some people can deal quite okay with that but others can’t, unfortunately the stress just ricochets throughout the whole department.” Another participant told me, “I was barely sleeping that week. I know my boss was the same. She was barely sleeping that week. It hadn’t affected either of us personally or our direct staff.” A management participant also accepted, “there’s bound to be a lot of anxiety amongst those affected and some of it will rub off onto others who are not directly affected.” This rubbing off heightened the emotional atmosphere of the merger because colleagues were exposed to each other’s emotions, which impacted on the emotional health and well-being of the institutions.

I recall an incident with a colleague I was close to that deeply upset me. We had different points of view about an end of year process, a work discussion that disintegrated into my colleague swearing at me, storming out of my office, and slamming the door. This person was very upset about the merger and the School of Business being closed, which I believe contributed to this outburst. They were unable to control the outcome of this discussion in the same way as they could not control the outcome of the merger. Sadly, when incidents like this occur the working environment suffers as do personal relationships.

Personal relationships were also affected by, as many participants confessed, a reduction in motivation or “energy to come to work.” As the merger felt like being in a war-zone and people were uncertain about their futures, coming to work accentuated the situation. To use the words of a participant, “when we all kind of get together we remind ourselves of the fact that we’re collectively in the poo.” This reluctance to be reminded of being “in the poo,” resulted in disengagement and withdrawal from the merger process and from colleagues who were likely best placed to provide empathy and much needed support.

A striking example of personal relationships changing was shared as a low point in the merger process by one management participant. “I had a colleague come and sit down and have a chat to me and say, and this colleague had been a long term friend, I can’t be

your friend anymore because I see you as having sort of sold out, as having changed your values, as having taken on a whole different view of the world. And I was absolutely gutted to think that somebody that you thought you knew very well inside and outside [of work] and so on, could think that you as a human being had changed because you had taken on a different role... I was quite saddened... Oh, it was amazingly hurtful actually.” Due to their management role in the merger process, this participant lost a personal friendship, at least for a time. This is a considerable social cost of the merger that left the participant feeling sad and hurt. Yet they hoped that “when time passes and they [the friend] see things happening and decisions being made, they might realise that I was doing whatever I was doing for the reasons that I thought were best at the time and yeah.”

Another participant shared their view of how emotions impacted relationships during change, “relationships can be damaged in these types of environments and they are, there’s no doubt about that, many people say, sticks and stones can break your bones, but names can never harm you. But that’s totally wrong, there are things that people can say to each other that can never be unsaid and it will change their relationship irrevocably. It does happen. And under stress, under change management, often things are said that later on you think I wish I hadn’t said that. It’s difficult to move away from, it changes the environment forever.” The point here is that in the emotionally charged atmosphere of a radical change environment things that are said or done will outlive the merger process itself.

Emotions that spilled over from the workplace and affected relationships were also discussed. Illustrated by this participant feeling misplaced anger at a family member and then at a stranger, “you have a little argument with your sister and then you have a big argument with your sister. Or in a supermarket, if someone’s like in the 10 items only queue and they’ve got 12, you feel like saying something to them. Or you at least tell the checkout operator, you know, it must be hard not being able to count.” Energy spent in episodes like this reduces resources available to invest in the change process while also increasing personal anxiety.

#### 4.6.2 *Defiance*

Emotion further surfaced in acts of defiance. I remember an email sent in July 2006 using the “all CCE” email address (after the ban on non-official emails), which contained the following “as the sun sinks slowly in the west, and the dank probing shadows of our sister organisation lengthen to engulf... a terminal message of cheer before my e-mail is itself deservedly terminated, and together with my grubby typewriter I am overtaken by the great delete button in the sky!” Although a minor and somewhat amusing rebellion, it does show emotion. This staff member was leaving and used words implying death such as “terminal,” and “the great delete button in the sky.” They also refer to the “dank probing shadows of our sister organisation lengthen[ing] to engulf,” which, by “engulf”, implied a takeover process occurring in the “shadows”.

In another act of defiance, one participant told me they had “verbally addressed” management representatives in a staff meeting, stormed out in anger, and “called them [management] shafters as I left the room.” This participant felt they “had shot myself in the foot. And I thought there will be no career opportunities for me now.” This outburst demonstrated frustration with the process, an inability to honestly express their opinion, and that they were clearly unhappy with prior events that had left them feeling “shafted.” It seems the lack of an appropriate channel for staff to be heard by management contributed to the suppression of their views and emotion, resulting in a pressure-cooker type incident. The idea that this merger lacked an appropriate channel for staff expression was illustrated when I approached a colleague to invite them to take part in this study. They said they really wanted to participate because they thought it would be good to get things off their chest and help them to move on. They explained they had heard of my study and were planning on talking to me about participating if I had not approached them. I realised if this individual wanted to seek me out to talk they must feel they had limited means or channels to express their merger feelings and views.

Defiant words were also shared, for example “... and you look at our leader over here, I mean, I wouldn’t follow that leader anywhere, let alone into the public loos [toilets].” This quote illustrated senior management had not won all staff hearts and minds, and that this participant did not feel supportive towards or prepared to follow their leader.



Another staff participant told me, “I think in overall terms, they’ve [management] just been utter bastards to us.” And still another, “at the end of the day I can say [to management], excuse me but this is going to go on the tape [interview recording], well [expletive] you, I can just take off. At the end of the day, I can just walk away from this. What sticks out in my mind most is about that lack of institutional care and duty of care and responsibility that it has to the very people who actually keep this going, this institution going.” These quotes demonstrated anger and disillusionment in management and the way staff were treated in the merger process.

A management participant also implied they were feeling disillusioned with part of the merger process when they shared, “I mean, right at the beginning I was led to believe that this was now an opportunity for UC to review their staff as well and to come out with the best staff and I don’t know if that’s going to happen.” They had believed the best of UC and CCE staff would be offered positions in the merged environment however, the reality of the situation was that it was mainly CCE staff disestablished in common areas such as, enrolments and records, and finance. This statement also revealed powerlessness and defeat. They are a member of the senior management team yet clearly felt they could not influence the merger process to ensure the best of UC and CCE staff secured positions, which suggested the real control was held by UC.

#### *4.6.3 Destruction and Violence*

Analogies chosen for merger events also demonstrate emotion. One staff member compared merger feelings with a tsunami, “you just feel that... sometimes I use the feeling of a tsunami, I keep looking out to sea and thinking, God, has the sea gone back or is it going to sweep back in again.” A tsunami evokes ideas of shock, destruction, havoc, and loss; not flattering parallels for the merger process.

Another staff participant included a violent reference when they discussed not letting the uncertainty of the merger stop you enjoying life, “you can’t know what the future holds and that’s just a reality of the environment we’re in and that’s just the reality of life. I’m sure that school teacher [refers to a recent murder of a school teacher in her classroom on a weekend] who went to prepare for her class, had no idea that that would be the last time she would do anything and that’s the vulnerability of life, and to dwell

on what could have been or what should have been negates what you can do, and what you should be doing with your life is living it to it's full." Choosing the murder reference to illustrate their point may be due to recency, I recall this murder occurred within a week of this interview, but it may also signal how deeply this participant felt the vulnerability imposed by the merger through potential job loss.

An additional symbol of death was mentioned in the context of discussions about the weekly activity update. A participant suggested their School car (each School/department was represented by a vehicle in the updates) should be replaced with a different symbol "maybe they might put a coffin there or something." The suggestion here of a coffin implied they saw no future for their School and were experiencing emotions associated with loss. A similar emotion was expressed by another staff member when talking about the closure of parts of CCE, "it feels like a death." When staff felt this way they likely required support and stability, but with so many people affected by the change experiencing a range of emotions, it is difficult to ascertain who would have been emotionally available to provide such support.

In line with the violent analogies of the merger process, two participants stated boiling a frog was like the information dispersion and communication freedom of the merger. One participant explained, "because change creates emotion, minimising the amount of information that's out there may minimise the emotional response of various people or, at least, we can use the classic boil the frog technique... The idea is that if you want to boil the frog, you can't throw a live frog in boiling water because as soon as it gets close to water, it will sense the heat and it will react, it'll bounce off and it will be gone. But if you put a frog in water that it's normally acquainted with, it will be quite happy and just degree by degree, you slowly raise the temperature until it suffocates and then dies and then you boil it and you've got a boiled frog. And change management to my point, my thinking, can be handled in a similar way. Rather than hit everybody with the hard facts, if we can just tweak little things bit by bit, you know, people sort of don't know the change or at least react reasonably low key so that it can be managed and then we bring on the next element. And thus we just, on a day-to-day or week-to-week basis, you don't see huge changes. But if you look at a year or 18 months, you think, oh my gosh look at where we were a year ago and look where we are now. Just like that boil a frog." This brutal little story suggested a number of emotions, distrust of communication and

lack of faith in the process, being the most obvious. These underlying emotions are likely to manifest in behaviour such as, withdrawal or disengagement from the change because the participant is unconvinced by the rhetoric and distrustful of the process.

#### *4.6.4 Uncertainty*

The uncertainty of the merger process contributed to emotional responses at times, illustrated by this frank description of receiving a change proposal, “I’d been away sick and I got the change proposal and looked at it and burst into tears because it was like, and again I was away sick because of all the uncertainty... how can you live and work in an environment where you don’t know what’s going on.” This staff member revealed much in their statement. They “don’t know what’s going on,” implied there was a communication breakdown between those running the merger and the recipients of it. This contributed to the uncertainty of the situation for people want to know how the merger would affect them and especially “what’s going on” with their job. The uncertain environment produced worry and stress, culminating in this participant feeling ill and defeated.

Management did recognise that the merger environment was beset with uncertainty. One participant told me, “well, ah yes I’ve had feedback that morale is not that good and, of course, probably that’s what I would expect because there’s a lot of unknowns and there’s a lot of uncertainty and also... there’s still a need to reduce the number of jobs.” This person admitted morale was not good but accepted it was part of the process “what I would expect,” and continued to focus on the merger process, part of which was to “reduce the number of jobs.” The difference between this quote and the previous staff quote is the lack of emotion, this member of management showed acceptance of the situation, versus the staff participant who felt grief and cried. The management participant also assured me that they had visited a group of staff recently and did not “think that they [the staff were] overly stressed, but I think that the uncertainty that is coming around the merger and the future is bound to make them feel apprehensive.” This comment showed some awareness of how staff felt by recognising that apprehension and stress were present in the process, but they qualify this by saying staff were not “overly stressed.” I wonder if staff would have agreed.

Another member of management conveyed a sense of inevitability regarding staff feeling uncertain by stating, “I wonder if it’s just how this thing we call the merger has its own sort of momentum. That once it gets started, it wouldn’t matter almost how much information you provided and support you gave, people almost wind themselves up into this anxiety frame of mind.” Undoubtedly the merger had its own momentum, especially when change proposals were released and staff anxiousness about job security increased. But suggesting that staff almost needlessly, “wind themselves up” seemed to lack empathy given the life-changing nature of disestablishment. It also hinted at management passiveness, the intimation being it was inevitable staff would be anxious so there was little point in providing more information and support to address this.

This management participant seemed aware of the effect the uncertainty and merger process duration had on staff, “it’s a climate of uncertainty and a climate of, as I said, rapid change. And even though people have expected it for probably more than a year, it’s only in this last three-month run to merger, it’s really hitting home to some people.” Yet again this is a passive statement; it considered how staff may feel but revealed no depth of personal emotion. Whereas another management participant implied some leadership culpability, “it was January 2005 when the senior executive team first discussed the merger and put their shoulder to the wheel so to speak, and here we are in August [2006], and still people don’t know where they’re going to be.” This acknowledged the period of uncertainty for staff had spanned over a year and a half, with no confirmation of their position or future with the organisations. This comment also suggested the participant believed such a situation to be a poor outcome for staff, which showed empathy and conceded the process had not worked out well for everyone involved.

#### *4.6.5 Intensity of Emotion*

During their interview two staff participants shared particularly moving experiences, which conveyed the intensity of emotion present in the merger. The first explained “I was really angry” after an incident at work because they received “quite a bit of hate mail including hate mail at home... like to give you an example, I got an email, and I got phone calls as well, and I got letters in my letterbox, like people had put notes in my

letterbox. They sort of said things like, you won't know me, but I know somebody who knows somebody, and I may name those people and you must be the biggest goodness knows what under the sun and... I would fire you right away. And I thought, who? These people don't even know who I am." To cope with such harassment from unknown people this participant, "had to get one of my colleagues to come in and clear my emails because I don't read them anymore... I just sort of said, look, would you just go through my emails and if there's any of those just delete them so I don't have to read any of them." Intense emotions created a supercharged atmosphere where it seemed, to some people, behaviour as extreme as harassment was defensible. This participant felt such treatment was unjustified, understandably they were angry, and were left with a feeling of dread that meant a colleague had to perform the everyday task of checking emails. This is an acute example of the social side of the merger process, which left this participant, at the very least, with unpleasant memories of part of the process. I would also like to think that the perpetrators of this harassment were left, at the very least, with a sense of wrongdoing.

The second intense emotional experience was shared by a staff member who had engaged in personally destructive behaviour to cope with the merger. "Yeah, I'm good now but I definitely had a drinking problem there for a while. I'd go out to lunch, I'd have a couple of glasses of wine, I wouldn't want to come back to work. I'd come back to work because I had lectures. I shouldn't have been lecturing. Then I'd go home and I'd drink some more and yeah, I probably did that. Admittedly [there were some issues in my personal life]. But yeah, I don't drink wine on my own now and I definitely don't drink at lunch time and I'm trying to give up smoking." This participant used wine to dull the reality of job uncertainty and personal issues, which by their admission created a "drinking problem" that undoubtedly required immense personal commitment and energy to resolve.

This story highlights that life still goes on during the merger process. This participant was faced with personal issues at the same time as merger job uncertainty. Another participant who had lost their father to cancer during the merger process shared, "outside those [working] hours we also have a life. So you've got this merger/ takeover/ disestablishment/ redundancy issue you're dealing with for eight hours of the day and then for the other eight hours of the day or however long it is that you have to fit in

everything else at home, you've still got other stuff that you've got to deal with." The impact of these combined pressures for both participants meant lower emotional reserves and resiliency to cope with the change process.

The participant who confessed to destructive drinking behaviour also shared that "I kind of went downhill big time. I got really unwell, I became depressed, for the first time in my life I went onto anti-depressants... because I just couldn't seem to gather the resources to get the energy to come to work and do my job and I also had to have sleeping pills because I was lying awake at night worrying about what I was going to do as far as a career." Their reliance, for this period on anti-depressants and sleeping pills, compounded the situation as the participant felt this was, "a real low point for me because I really kind of felt like I'd kind of failed. I failed myself then." This example of social behaviour, attributed in part to the merger process, emphasised how deeply people can be affected by change processes.

Of course, intense emotions are exhausting and as one participant explained to cope they had "tried cutting myself adrift from the emotion side of the whole merger process." They tried this because "otherwise it will be too stressful. Running things continually through my head again and again and again, which can't change the future. I had to come to a point and say, well that's defeating the purpose. There are better things I could do with my time... But you can't totally say, I can't go the opposite and say, wow, I'm a happy person and I don't mind this merger, it's all right. Life's fun, these are nice people, I can't do that too because that's going contrary to what my reality is." Even after attempting to create distance, emotions still simmered under the surface, as this quote implied the participant actually felt unhappy, did mind the merger, were having no fun, and did not think "these" people involved with the merger were nice.

#### *4.6.6 Concern for Others*

Yet amongst the strain, a positive emotion was also discussed: concern for others. This emotion resulted in improved collegiality and thoughtfulness towards other people. One participant explained "I was probably naive at the time in thinking that I could remove myself from feeling so strongly about the people. That's really surprised me." Feeling affected by the situations of others struck this participant unexpectedly as they realised

how much they cared about their colleagues. Another participant shared how concern brought staff closer but made the merger experience more real, “how it [the merger] will impact on other people and being concerned for them and it just brings it closer, yeah, it just makes it that more real.” One general staff member felt that “even though we know we’re being disestablished or potentially, we’re going to be disestablished, that doesn’t matter, it’s just brought everyone together, and for those who’ve had their positions disestablished, there’s a sense of togetherness. You’re not alone. You’re not alone in feeling unmotivated. You’re not alone in feeling let down or pissed off or whatever.” This togetherness prevented people from feeling isolated and provided a support mechanism for dealing with the change. Cohesion was also present within Schools or departments, “I think within the School, we took good care of each other. I have a sense of pride over that because I think it could have been a lot worst, because we became a really strong cohesive unit as a result and so that was a positive.”

Participants also acknowledged they showed concern for each other across the two institutions and felt that in some respects they were in it together, “we might get a bit cross about different things and we might view things differently, but we’re all experiencing the same issues, a sense of change, a sense of loss that brings about that, the sense of excitement and the sense of apprehension (laughing) and so we can have that commonality.” This commonality also opened cross-institutional communication channels, “I think people are talking, I think there is a bringing together as well that comes with that.”

This helped participants to recognise that it was important to be, “able to put yourself in that position of, if I was that person and I was hearing this, how would I like to be treated.” And, participants empathised with those losing their jobs, “enormous disappointment for the people... who have lost their positions... and that’s been a hugely difficult experience.”

#### *4.6.7 Management Emotion*

Much of this discussion of emotion has drawn on the staff perspective. Yet management participants also spoke of emotion in their interviews. One participant admitted feeling, “there is no stability in the whole thing so it’s slightly, it’s that sort of slight sense of

being overwhelmed by all the change.” This showed they were not immune to feeling the instability of the merger. Another confessed feeling, “self doubt actually... can I get to grips with this thing and will I be able to hold this together?” Faced with the challenge of being a management member during the merger process, this person initially felt insecure about their ability to participate. However, the merger presented an opportunity for them to rise to the challenge and gain experience, so overall was considered a positive experience.

Another management member disclosed, “I’ve felt all sorts of emotions I suppose, at times frustration, at times anxiety [sighs]. Unexpected difficulties with the School of Business, I suppose as well. Anxiety about the same, you know. Will we get the outcomes that we want?” The merger process caused worry for this management participant, which particularly seemed to be associated with a reduction in control when events did not progress according to plan such as, “unexpected difficulties with the School of Business.” There is a parallel here with staff who felt anxious because they had no control over the merger process.

One senior management participant shared how they coped with the emotion of the merger by saying, “sometimes you have to be quite dispassionate about these things and say, there’s a job to do, I need to do it. On the other hand I’ve played a few little psychology tricks on myself to try and make things a little bit easier for me. I say things to myself like, it’s [the role] that X, Y and Z don’t like, it’s not [me]. Now that may not be true, but truth doesn’t matter here (laughing). It’s getting you through a pretty bad time. And the other little psychology trick that I play on myself is that I say that, tomorrow, or next week or next year, I’ll think about things in a slightly different way. I’ll remember the general uncomfortable-ness of it all, but some of the specific details and intentions won’t be quite so to the forefront of my mind. So, yeah, you see it as a job that you have to do and you try and look after yourself as you do it.” This quote revealed that like staff, management also experienced bad times within the change process, during which, this participant tried to escape from the merger by reminding themselves that memory fades, as well as by explaining away the uncomfortable aspects of the merger as just being part of their role.



In common with staff, some management participants expressed sadness about the end of CCE, “sadness that they’re dismantling things that we’ve put together/built up, the sadness of people moving on,” and “I mean I feel a sense of sadness that the College has gone because it’s got a long long history as a separate entity.” These participants felt a sense of loss for the way things were even though they, as management, were driving the very process that was doing the dismantling.

And, a few management members alluded to some alienation from staff. One participant admitted to me that staff did not treat them the same as they had before the merger process commenced, but that they would not expect staff to given that there had been many changes and job losses. Another participant shared feeling alienated, “in those early stages when people were trying to get to grips with my role, both from staff members and some of the managers, then it settled down... I could walk into the staff room and I felt people greeted me warmly and I felt, I didn’t feel that I had become an outsider.” Yet this participant believed that sentiment had changed with the recent distribution of the change proposals, “right now with change proposals going out, I think that’s probably tested again.” Socially, senior management members are distanced from staff because they are the merger decision-makers and therefore responsible for merger outcomes. It is inevitable that with the disestablishment of jobs, staff felt less warmly towards management, which placed strain on relationships.

A different perspective on emotion was presented by one management participant who commented, “I’ve felt frustration too about, not rumour mongering that’s a bit strong, but where people get half of the story or the wrong end of the stick or whatever and create something that actually isn’t there and isn’t what was being planned and isn’t what somebody said and it gets around in a way. If I’m trying to be very careful now to be sort of neutral, so should everybody else at least sort of examine their own behaviours and say, well is this necessary? Do I need to go on and on about this or be so negative. Maybe there is a different side to the story.” In the change atmosphere people reacted to “half of the story or the wrong end of the stick,” which this member of management interpreted as how rumours start. They would prefer that staff, like management, were “neutral,” examined their behaviour, and looked for the other side of the story. Yet it is difficult to see how staff would know they only had half the story, and why they should be neutral when they had so much at stake such as, their jobs.

Perhaps management's privileged access to information facilitated their ability to be neutral by knowing the full story and the background of decisions.

#### *4.6.8 Emotion Conclusion*

The uncertainty from change combined with the threat/fear of job and livelihood loss drove many emotional experiences. For if a participant secured another job, within UC or externally, they faced an inevitable change in routine, environment, and people. Management and staff emotions differed around job security. A number of management participants secured or were offered roles in the new structure, whereas many staff were disestablished. Perhaps because they had less job uncertainty and more process control than staff, management felt less fearful about the future, less uncertainty, and more optimism.

Clearly, both personal life incidents and merger process events contributed to how individual participants felt about the merger at any given time. Intense emotions manifested in different social behaviours including misplaced anger, drinking, yelling, and withdrawal. These behaviours impacted on the wider community of friends, family, and colleagues, heightening the merger atmosphere and straining personal relationships. Positively, concern for others was also present and created unity amongst staff while facilitating support behaviours. And, although management recognised emotion was present they largely accepted this as part of the process, which may have contributed to their lack of effort to manage staff emotions or reduce dysfunctional staff behaviour. Stress and tension were present in this change process yet there is little evidence of management expertise or effort being expended in conflict resolution.

#### *4.7 Findings and Discussion Conclusion*

The participants in this study shared their merger experiences in one-to-one interviews conducted during the period when successive change proposals were released and staff were being disestablished as a result. The key interview themes uncovered were: involvement, meaning making, use of language, and expression of emotions.

First, involvement suggested that staff felt excluded from the process with no mechanisms to vent or share their feelings. For although management believed

appropriate structures were in place for consultation, not enough attention was paid to processes. This exclusion meant staff felt powerless resulting in several forms of exit behaviour ranging from escapism, disengagement, and defiance, to the withholding of effort.

The second theme explored was meaning making in the merger process. Staff, recipients of the change, attributed different meanings to the merger than management commanding the change did. This was most obvious in the disestablishment discussion, which to staff meant a personal negative message that they were not valued whereas management hoped disestablishment would be perceived as an opportunity to do something new. Some participants considered the merger an opportunity, while others mourned the loss of jobs, colleagues, and institutional identity. And, on a personal level the merger impacted participants relationships, confidence, moods, career, and provoked self-assessment.

Third, through the use of language it was revealed that the merger was a battle and participants felt like they were in a war-zone. This was visible through the adopted war language of change where speech was rich with battles, violence, and strategy. The second, less obvious change in language involved re-naming merger characters and the process itself in unflattering terms. This signalled unhappiness and dissatisfaction with the process.

Last, personal life incidents and merger process events contributed to the intense emotions felt throughout the merger. Emotion manifested both in- and out- side of the workplace as misplaced anger, drinking, yelling, or withdrawal. The emotion staff experienced affected not only the individual but their colleagues and wider social network as well, in particular straining personal relationships. Little management expertise or effort was discernible in conflict resolution, even though much tension was present in the change process.

Chapter five now explores the use of humour as a prop during the merger.

## 5 Chapter Five: Humour as a Prop

### 5.1 *Introduction to Humour as a Prop*

“Humour brings insight and tolerance. Irony brings a deeper and less friendly understanding” - Agnes Repplier

[http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/topics/topic\\_humor.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/topics/topic_humor.html),

retrieved 20 September, 2007).

To answer in part my research goal of determining merger communication processes, this chapter focuses on the use of humour as a prop to convey merger messages. Throughout the change process, props were used to express the text of humour along with an underlying sub-text of emotion. The vehicles for humour that I will explore in this chapter are a science fiction DVD trilogy, a word game, altered advertisements, costumes, and merger roadmaps.

### 5.2 *Stir Wars*

Described as “a bit of fun,” the first prop I discuss is a science fiction trilogy named *Stir Wars* created by CCE’s video production unit (VPU). As the name suggests, this trilogy was intended to stir things up using humour. Episode I was released late in 2005 followed by episode II early in 2006, and III at end of July 2006. I was alerted to the first and second instalments through word of mouth but the finale’s release was communicated via an “all-CCE” email titled “last one out, kill the lights!” I do not want to overstate the relevance of this prop as a comment on merger social processes, but I believe it is rare to have captured such an interesting form of pre-merger staff expression. And, being written, directed, and produced by CCE, *Stir Wars* is unashamedly all about them.

Undoubtedly, *Stir Wars* was produced to entertain. Yet staff participants believed it also had a serious message, which suggested the trilogy was ineffective at masking an undercurrent of emotion. As this participant observed, “it did express at the time how everyone was feeling. Because that was at the beginning and that was when everyone was feeling, hey this is a takeover not a merger, it was humorous. I mean you didn’t have to take it to heart or anything and it was funny and it was just what everyone

needed at the time.” Another participant saw *Stir Wars* as a voice for staff in the merger, a way to participate instead of just watching the change unfold. As they explained, [I] “think it’s all good, they’ve helped people feel like someone has expressed how they are feeling perhaps, which is that something’s happening to the College rather than the College is actively doing, you know what I mean? That it’s something that has been acted upon.”

Unlike its namesake, this science fiction trilogy is not set in a galaxy far, far away. Instead it takes viewers, as described in the first episode, to the smaller of the two institutions where staff were “understandably anxious not to be disadvantaged,” while “major decisions on merging the Christchurch College of Education and the University of Canterbury inch towards a conclusion.” This beginning portrayed a negative merger scene, where staff were anxious and decision-making was slow. However, true to its humorous purpose, episode I also introduced the trilogy’s antihero with “as we go to air we have unconfirmed reports that a most unexpected ally could be rallying to the staff cause,” after which a Dalek appeared onscreen complete with an evil laugh. Although I recall the Daleks’ appearance got a big laugh, the sub-text implied here is that staff felt they needed an ally to champion their cause.

For those readers who are unfamiliar with Daleks (pronounced “DAH-lecks”), Wikipedia describes them as “a fictional extraterrestrial race of mutants from the British science fiction television series *Doctor Who*... [who are] bent on universal conquest and domination. They are devoid of any emotion save hate, without pity, compassion or remorse. Their most infamous catchphrase is EX-TER-MIN-ATE!” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalek>, retrieved 31 July 2006). Although this appeared an interesting choice of staff ally, I was told the inclusion of the Dalek character was purely opportunistic. The “life-size” Dalek happened to be on display at the CCE library and after a CCE staff member demonstrated it in action, the VPU filmed it and having filmed it, thought it might amuse staff to blow up the University. Amusing as it was, *Stir Wars* centred around this creature focused on destruction, suggesting a sub-text of war. Or even, as Wikipedia claim, if the term Dalek is applied figuratively to people it describes those in authority who behave like robots controlled by their programming.

The Dalek sub-text was not lost on staff viewers of *Stir Wars*. One participant explained “the Dalek is an exterminator. It is classified as the most evil alien in the universe and bent on extermination. Of course there is a sense of feeling that this whole merger process, that in a sense it is an extermination of certain tiers within the Christchurch College of Education and the complete extermination of the School of Business.” Upon reflection, the extermination attempts don’t seem completely one-sided for UC’s School of Education also faced an elimination of their way of life. They faced a different habitat (if moved to CCE campus), a new structure (as they would be split across different Schools/Departments), unfamiliar colleagues, and an alien culture that to date had focused on the classroom instead of the research terrain favoured by UC.

The Dalek’s main activity in *Stir Wars*, described by one participant as “shooting at the University,” was often discussed in interviews accompanied by laughter. Blowing up UC was considered “very amusing in capital letters in an ironic kind of a way.” However, that staff enjoyed their soon-to-be employing organisation being destroyed implied sub-text that CCE staff felt their livelihoods, their value to education, and their way of working, was under attack from the merger for which UC was considered responsible. This idea was reinforced as episode II commenced with, “since the arrival of the College’s secret weapon in the war on merger, the spirits of staff have been lifted.” This comment revealed the social perspective that the merger felt like an assault on CCE and any reprieve, even from a Dalek intent on exterminating UC, was welcome.

*Stir Wars* humour also involved the inclusion of archive footage of CCE’s Principal narrated as follows: “the pressure is clearly telling on their leader, who has adopted an unconvincing disguise and moved back to teaching.” This footage depicted the Principal in a classroom teaching high school students “disguised” by a beard. This was quite an effective comic relief moment and distracted viewers from the underlying destruction theme. However, this reference to a disguise may hint at disappointment in senior management’s visibility as the merger progressed. Although not mentioned in reference to *Stir Wars*, the reduction of senior management members’ visibility came up in interviews. For example, this participant observed, “we haven’t seen him. He hasn’t come down and said, hi, how are you going. And I think that from his point, I actually think, I think he needs to. I think he’s probably very uncomfortable with the idea of having to go down and face the staff. He knows they’re disgruntled and unhappy.”

Unfortunately, Dalek's can not be trusted and in episode II the "double-crossing evil ally [Dalek] soon revealed its true colours and turned on their [CCE's] sacred icons." In addition to blowing up UC buildings, it destroyed the office of a member of CCE's senior management, a lawn mower being used by a facilities staff member, Andy (the College cat and also the sacred icon referred to in the narration), and two staff members. This rampage provoked laughter and illustrated the change in social opinion from UC being wholly blamed for the destruction of the merger, to CCE management also having responsibility.

Losing Andy the College cat apparently caused uproar amongst College staff so he was resurrected in instalment III. But in reality, even Andy didn't escape disestablishment. He was "relocated" in August 2006; a move that featured in the weekly activity update email with the explanation that it was "not an ending but a new beginning for Andy." This new beginning was not popular with staff and his "disestablishment" fast became a topic of conversation. One participant shared that they had "only once been reduced to tears and that was actually when I got phoned the other day and said do you want to come and say goodbye to Andy because he's going to his new home. And it was interesting that for everyone there's a little trigger when you give yourself permission to just completely dissolve... it gave me the permission to just have an emotional reaction." Andy's "new beginning" pre-empted many "new beginnings" for staff who were disestablished.

Stir Wars was also enjoyed by staff because the VPU had dared to produce it, as if that act of rebellion conveyed a message. As this participant explained the "fact that they dared to do that, that they had the courage to do that and I thought that it was superb... if you looked at the seriousness, the message behind that it was the fact that, you know, we've just been taken over by these aliens." The underlying message this participant heard was that CCE has "been taken over by these aliens," which suggested UC were considered unfamiliar, perhaps even hostile, but certainly invaders. It does seem a brave act when staff jobs are on the line, to draw attention to yourself as a producer of Stir Wars. Especially as some staff believed "the best way to survive at this point in time is probably no feedback to management, you know. Yeah, low profile. Just keep your head down. Do your work. Try and make sure nobody's unhappy with you, students or staff, and just hope for the best."

A further Dalek rampage, this time in episode III, again provoked much laughter by including the destruction of a member of UC's senior management and four student casualties, who were described as "four healthy EFTS." The EFTS reference was amusing because it epitomised the underlying monetary focus prevalent at CCE at the time. But luckily for CCE, Andy (the College cat) returned and fought back destroying the Dalek. Stir Wars episode III was concluded with "The End" displayed on screen, after which CCE VPU logos emerge that are promptly squashed by a foot in a black boot before UC VPU logos appear. This logo squashing unveiled a sub-text of negative emotion towards the merger and the re-branding of CCE VPU to UC, which using the preferred merger tool of a change proposal included a reduction in staff.

Of course not everyone enjoyed Stir Wars nor found it humorous. One participant saw the negative sub-text and described it as a "tad juvenile, and I think they [the episodes] are the result of people [staff] being angry [at]... the people who are causing them to stress, and considering that the videos are a safe way of venting that anger." Perhaps Stir Wars can be interpreted as safe by virtue of being less confrontational than speaking to management directly, or because it is "art" so no topic is sacred, or even because management can not make a rebuttal easily in this medium. This participant's comment had merit for when asked, at the end of July 2006, the CCE VPU confirmed there had been no repercussions for making Stir Wars and in fact management had not spoken to them about it at all. Although this participant was not complimentary about the trilogy, their comments confirmed emotion underlying Stir Wars was visible to staff such as, "being angry" and "stressed."

Eight, out of ten, CCE staff participants had seen at least one Stir Wars episode, yet for something publicly accessible (the videos were left in the staffroom) only two management participants had seen it or knew it existed. It may be that management weren't spending much time in the staffroom; if so their absence from the staffroom was not unique. As one participant recalled, "fewer and fewer people have come to morning and afternoon tea. Sometimes you feel that you might have misread it and it might be a public holiday and you should go home." Staff room visits aside, management's communication lines with the troops must have been down to have not heard of Stir Wars. And, sadly being largely unaware of this prop meant they missed out on diagnosing and responding to the underlying current of merger emotion that the



trilogy conveyed. This also pointed to the disengagement of the management from the staff during a critical period of change.

One senior management participant explained to me that they “saw it for what it was worth. Sometimes it’s quite good to have a, when you’re going through difficult times it’s good to have something that’s a little jocular which enters it... Who was it that was being fired across with bullets or shells or cannons or something?... I don’t get too worried about those sorts of things.” It was UC and CCE buildings and people that were destroyed (“fired across”) in Stir Wars. This participant recognised staff need humour in difficult times, which shows empathy. That they couldn’t recall who or what was being blown up however, indicated they took less interest in Stir Wars than staff did. And their comment that they, “don’t get too worried about those sorts of things” is either an acceptance of the trilogy as the “bit of fun” that it was, or an ignorant dismissal of the negative merger message conveyed in the sub-text underlying the humour.

Another management participant appreciated Stir Wars humour early in the process but felt lacklustre towards the episodes as the merger progressed. They recounted that “I laughed and I thought it was fun. [But] it was playing the other day when I went into the staff room, and my reaction was different. I was just getting a cup of tea and I thought, ah, right now I don’t think, and it was just a fleeting reaction, but it was, right now I don’t think it’s that helpful. That whole vision of blasting away at UC. And I’m thinking that, in an environment that’s emotionally raw because of the change proposals, and I guess what was in my mind is, I guess we have moved on in the last 16 months.” They are right “blasting away at UC,” even when expressed as humour, is not helpful for the rhetoric that the merger was a positive event. This shows disconnection between staff and management. Perhaps management had “moved on in the last 16 months” but staff who enjoyed Stir Wars, and were still unsure of their futures, possibly had not.

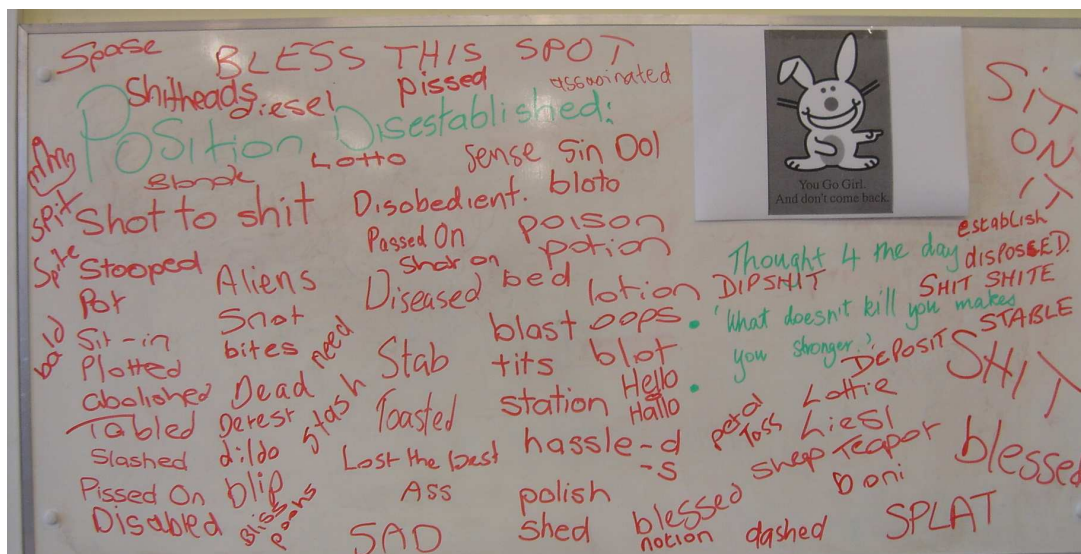
Undoubtedly, Stir Wars was a clever prop that conveyed merger humour and was enjoyed by many staff. Yet under the text of humour, an emotional reaction to CCE’s perceived destruction caused by the merger was visible, an undercurrent recognised by many participants.

### 5.3 Word Game

Humour was also used in less public ways than producing a merger trilogy. The next prop I discuss adorned the CCE registry staff only area. The means to convey humour this time was a word game with the purpose of amusing the enrolment and records team after their change proposal had been released, which disestablished all 11 positions. Twelve new UC positions appeared in the “to be advertised” change proposal section; of which two were fixed term and three were 0.67 full-time equivalent (FTE). That staff chose “position disestablished” as the foundation for their word game, conveyed that the poignant message contained in the change proposal was not the possibility of applying for new UC positions but the disestablishment of their existing roles.

Figure 5.1 illustrates the whiteboard featuring this game, which a staff member admitted to me displayed “some [words that] are fairly rank, because we just didn’t care.” When visiting this whiteboard I was told that a CCE member of senior management had come “down and had a look at our wall... and he was fine. Oh no, he’s been really good.” I got a sense that looking at the whiteboard had been interpreted as a gesture of empathy and had been an opportunity for humour to draw people together. This suggestion was supported by a participant’s comment that the board had “been a source of lightness for a lot of lecturers. They come in, we’ve even had academic staff adding to the wall for God’s sake.” Staff outside the enrolments and records team participating in this game indicated humour created a sense of unity amongst colleagues.

Figure 5.1: “Position Disestablished” Word Game



Overwhelming the word game featured pessimistic, words such as, shot to shit, splat, poison, detest, slashed, abolished, and stab. However, it was not without cynicism for example, lost the best, you go girl and don't come back (bunny cartoon). Nor was the game lacking the odd disparaging remark for instance, the creation of a word from the Principal's surname suggested staff felt the Principal was responsible for the disestablishments. "Aliens" perhaps suggested that the "unfamiliar" UC culture was taking over CCE. And, as it was a game, some harmless words also appear, including teapot, hello, lotto, petal, and blessed.

I did laugh when staff proudly revealed this whiteboard to me. However, on reflection I realised this game filled me with a sense of sadness, as it seemed this team was reeling from a change proposal that had disestablished all their jobs. They had used the word game to make light of a job loss situation but also as a way to share their hurt and frustration.

The word game was useful in this period of change as it provided a distraction and lifted people's spirits. It also provided staff with a means to express themselves, know they were not alone in the way they felt, and to share their emotions so they could enjoy the support of their colleagues. However, this humorous prop was ineffective at masking the hurt and anger staff felt from being disestablished.

#### *5.4 Altered Advertisements*

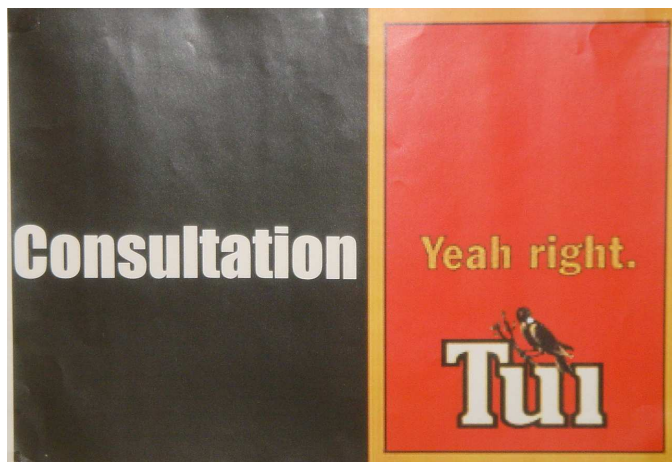
Humour also appeared in the form of altered advertisements. Next I review two examples that I was aware of during the merger process i) Tui beer advertisements and ii) official merger advertisements.

First, in a combination of two popular student traits, beer and humour, fake Tui beer advertisements were created and displayed at the November 16, 2005 CCE Council meeting. This meeting was significant because, as described in a CCE press release, it was at that "special meeting held today to consider the School [of Business]'s future in light of the proposed merger with the University of Canterbury, [that] the CCE Council

decided the School will be wound down if the merger proposal is approved by the Government.”

Although an upsetting outcome for School of Business staff and students, the meeting took place in a colourful setting adorned with fake posters, which played on the Tui beer campaign “Yeah right”. These advertisements were humorous because they had two panels, one was black and featured a lie, and the other had Tui branding colours with the statement “Yeah right” that indicated the lie was not believable. An example of a real Tui advertisement text is “Quiet student seeks room, Yeah Right.” Figure 5.2 demonstrates an example of a fake Tui poster used at the Council meeting; it states “Consultation, Yeah right.” Even through this effective utilisation of humour, the implication is clear. Staff and students did not feel consulted over the decision to wind down the School of Business.

Figure 5.2: Altered Tui Advertisement



The second example of an altered advertisement was posted on a staff notice board. Humour was used this time to revise the meaning of an official merger advertisement that appeared in papers across New Zealand during August 2006. It was suggested by one participant that this prop was an example of how some people were coping with the merger, “I think some people are perhaps dealing with the situation by sort of jokes. So we had an example of that in the staff meeting where somebody had produced a new advertisement for the Canterbury University and College merger, where they had given little speech balloons to [organisational leaders].”

The advertisement's text attributed to the depicted organisational leaders was altered from positive statements about the merger to inflammatory and derogatory ones. An extract from the altered text reads, "Comrade [name], we have been most impressed by your ability to destroy this once thriving institution." Again, similar to Stir Wars, the idea of destruction is present and the term "comrade," commonly associated with the Soviet Union, suggested imagery of oppression. This attempt at humour is clearly unsuccessful at masking the strong negative sub-text towards the merger. Instead, this advertisement appeared to be a way of venting at senior management under the guise of humour.

### 5.5 *Costumes*

Another prop used to convey humour was people's attire. The most flamboyant example of this that I saw during the merger was a staff member wearing fairy wings on a semi-regular basis (a couple of times per week) in September 2006. Sadly I do not have a photograph!

I admit seeing someone walking around campus wearing fairy wings bought a smile to my face, and when I asked them about the unique outfit I was told, "you can do stuff like that and wear way out clothing or start to actually be a bit, I don't know, a bit more freer in what you do because, who cares. They can't fire you. They're not going to ask you to leave because they need you and it's creating a sense of likeness, and you walk around the College with fairy wings or with a crown on or with whatever and it's like, oh my God. But you get people laughing." This prop was effective in masking negative merger emotions as it clearly produced much laughter and enjoyment. Yet, in their explanation, the fairy wings owner did hint at some underlying feelings of nonchalance for they felt they can be "a bit more freer in what you do because, who cares. They can't fire you." And although a subtle point, I believe, that prior to the merger wearing fairy wings at work would have been considered unprofessional therefore, adorning them in this time of change signalled rebelliousness.

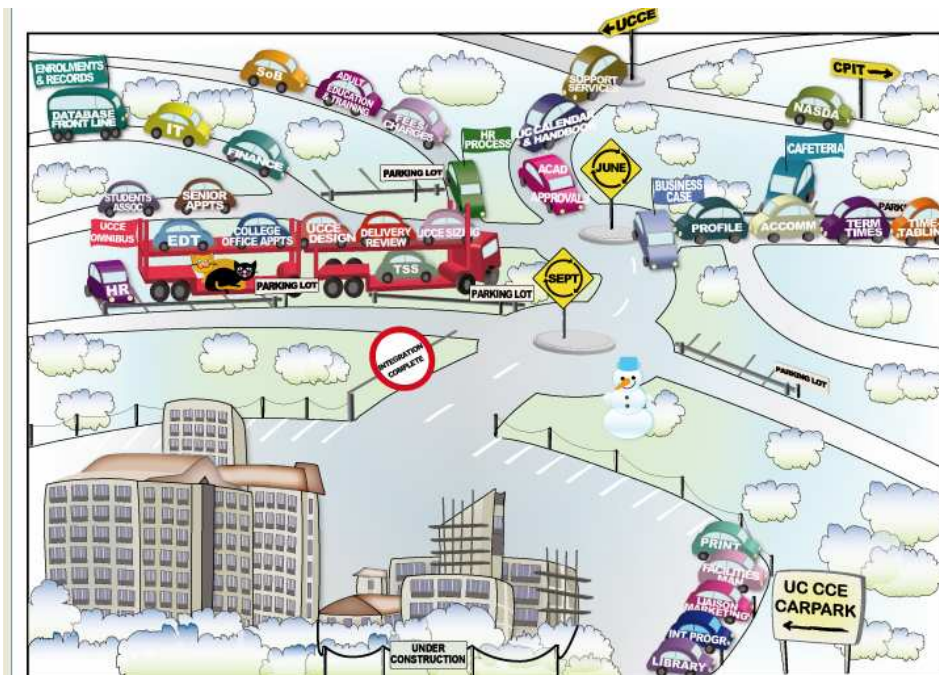
Another costume change I noticed during the second half of 2006, which admittedly was not humorous, was that working attire became more casual. For example, staff who previously had worn suits to work starting wearing jeans and shirts, and as a result the

CCE campus often resembled “casual Friday.” This may have signalled a number of responses to the change such as, staff were unprepared to make an effort when dressing for work; or felt more relaxed towards their work so they dressed in a more relaxed manner; or were experiencing detachment for they felt there was no future with the institution.

## 5.6 Merger Roadmap

The last prop to include humour that I will discuss is the merger roadmap. This cartoon was introduced in the April 21, 2006 official weekly activity update distributed by CCE Human Resources department to provide a snapshot view of merger progress. In the cartoon each department/area appeared as a vehicle as shown in Figure 5.3. The pictured roadmap from June 23, 2006, six months prior to the merger date of January 1, 2007, demonstrates that with less than half a year to go there were five vehicles/departments in the UC CCE car park, which left the majority of departments queued in traffic. Although the sub-text conveyed here is one of uncertainty for those areas caught in traffic, the cartoon itself attempted frivolity by adding a snowman, reflective of recent snowfalls.

Figure 5.3: Merger Roadmap Activity Update June 23, 2006







Second, and the main topic discussed by participants, was the lack of clarity the cartoon conveyed as this staff member observed, “we stayed in the same spot until just a few weeks ago. [I was] looking at it each week thinking, oh yeah, same ol’, same ol, so in the end you stopped looking at it. But then all of a sudden everyone’s moving at once and then it’s like, gosh, okay everyone’s moving, what’s going on here?”

Third, the appropriateness of a cartoon and the use of humour were questioned. As this participant explained, “I think the roadmap is kind of juvenile. And it’s an attempt to try and make light of a serious situation, and inject a bit of sort of brevity or humour. It’s just, it’s just too cute for words.” Another participant agreed, “the cute little roadmap and the canned humour or canned wisdom, just annoys me, it just seems flippant.” But, as this management participant explained they were aware of the conflicting staff feelings provoked by the cartoon, “some people think it lacks sophistication. It is insulting, why are people drawing pictures and cartoons when we’re an academic institution. [Conversely] there was some comment from a staff member that after 18 months someone has at last explained the merger to me.” Overall, the roadmap seemed an unsuccessful attempt to reach staff on a lighter pictorial level rather than through text. The roadmap cartoon humour seemed to be welcomed by some participants, but it was also a target for negative emotion from others.

Another aspect of this merger prop that unmasked staff emotion was the quotes contained in each update. One participant shared that they felt annoyed by the “quotes at the end... especially the ones about how change is great, that just seems like rubbing your nose in it really.” Another participant considered them “patronising in my opinion. The gleeful, happy quotes that if you don’t embrace change then you’re defective in some way. That’s the general theme of the quotes, is that the bright smart people embrace change and all the others are deficient in some way, just all seem to be totally inappropriate in this environment, given what was happening at the time.” Clearly these weekly quotes were not a prop that made staff feel happy or inspired, and instead provided another target for underlying negative merger emotion.



### 5.7 *Humour Conclusion*

This chapter has revealed the use of humour as a prop in the merger process. Although conveying the creativity of staff, all the props examined were, at varying levels, ineffective at masking negative emotional sub-text felt towards the merger. These various props suggest humour itself was used as a form of resistance in the merger process.

Stir Wars episodes I, II and III were an elaborate production popular with staff. Yet this trilogy exposed emotion relating to the perceived destruction of CCE caused by the merger. And although humorous, the word game created by enrolments and records staff also conveyed emotion; in this instance the hurt and frustration associated with being disestablished.

Next, the discussion of altered advertisements used to express humour showed the Tui campaign to be well liked and amusing, while publicly challenging the CCE Council's decision and perhaps attempting to rally people to the School of Business cause. The official merger advertisement's altered text was much less successful as a means to convey humour and instead vented at senior management.

Costumes were the most effective prop at communicating humour but on close examination suggested some staff nonchalance and rebelliousness. Last, the roadmap cartoon roused a mixed response from staff. Deemed a good alternative to the traditional text dissemination of information by some, the cartoon and quotes were also considered juvenile by other participants. This resulted in a prop that was provocative of negative emotion rather than a tool to transmit humour.

The next chapter presents the conclusions of this study.

## **6 Chapter Six: Conclusions**

### *6.1 Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to examine the social dynamics of a pre-merger process between two tertiary education organisations, CCE and UC, in Christchurch, New Zealand. As I was a member/insider of the CCE culture and affected by the merger, an emic (insider) approach was selected for this research (Martin, 2002). Using an impressionist narrative style, combined with information about the author, this merger tale aimed to empower the reader to uncover biases or hidden interests (Martin, 2002).

Secondary and primary data were utilised to achieve the research goals discussed in chapter one. Secondary data was collected from reviewing organisational documents including change and communication policies. Primary data sources included: i) personal interviews with academic and general staff, management, and one student at the merging institutions, ii) participant observation, and iii) reflexivity.

In the following sections I conclude this study with the findings related to my research goals.

### *6.2 Similarities and Differences in Management and Staff Perceptions of the Merger Process*

There were both similarities and differences between management and staff perceptions of this merger process. Areas where they shared similar views included: length of the process; pace of the change; staff morale; and the CCE School of Business demise. Perceptions of the process where management and staff differed relate to: merger focus; information being withheld; communication; and staff morale.

The first area where management and staff held similar perceptions was the length of the merger process, which spanning two years was accepted as too long by both groups. Much of the delay was attributed to slow responses from Government departments such as, TAMU, and TEC, and waiting for the Minister for Tertiary Education to approve the merger. The long duration of the change process resulted in sustained periods of uncertainty followed by pressure on timeframes to achieve a merger by January 1, 2007.

Management and staff also shared similar views about the pace of the merger, which increased considerably towards the end of the process and subsequently felt rushed. This pace contributed to shortened consultation periods and an overlap of what should have been distinct phases. For example, positions were disestablished and departments closed at the same time as advertisements appeared in nationwide press celebrating the new amalgamated organisation. There were no clear grieving periods to farewell the past respectfully before hurrying into the future.

To a degree, both staff and management accepted the impact of the merger process on morale. Due to the constant threat of job loss, this uncertainty produced anxiety, which inevitably had a negative affect on morale. And, the last area where staff and management shared similar perceptions, related to the demise of the CCE School of Business. Both groups considered this a difficult part of the merger process and recognised the emotional toll it took on people.

However, management and staff also held dissimilar perceptions of the merger process in a number of areas. Most notably regarding staff involvement, consultation, and meaning making in the merger, which are discussed later in this chapter. Another point of difference between staff and management was their focus in the merger process. For staff, the focus was on how people were affected. Staff raised concerns about whether their position would be disestablished, would they need to move to a different campus, etc. Yet their concerns were not limited to themselves, staff often expressed concern for colleagues. Management revealed a different focus. They recognised the change process impacted people but focused on how the merger affected the institution's viability and sustainability.

Throughout the merger process staff had less information than management. And being a time of radical change, the reasons for this lack of information were perceived differently by staff and management. Staff believed management were hiding things and excluding them, whereas pressure to meet merger timeframes may have meant management felt their ability to be more consultative was restricted.

Communication was also an area where staff and management held separate views. Staff felt communication was poor and not credible, referring to it as propaganda. They also believed they were communicated at rather than with, highlighting that communication was not two-way. Management believed they had communicated appropriately through a variety of channels such as, forums, the Human Resource department's weekly activity update emails, and the merger website.

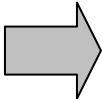
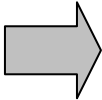
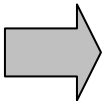
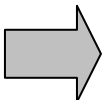
Last, staff morale appears in both the similar and different perception categories. For although both management and staff recognised the merger process had an impact on morale they had distinct views on the extent of this impact. Staff believed morale was very low and that management did not care. Management however were inconsistent in their concern over the level of morale, with some participants stating morale was low and others considering it manageable.

### *6.3 Importance of Social Dynamics in Mergers*

In this study, social dynamics are defined as use of language, expression of emotions, meaning making, and exit behaviour. Social dynamics are important because they influence the process, convey much about how staff feel and cope with the organisational change, and indicate processes that require attention.

Through one-to-one interviews, observation, and reflexivity, themes comprising this study's definition of social dynamics were revealed and linked to behaviour. Table 6.1 summarises each of these themes, what it disclosed about how the merger was interpreted, and the behaviour likely to be associated with that social characteristic. These themes are then discussed in the following sections.

Table 6.1: A Summary of Merger Social Dynamics

| Social Dynamic  | Disclosed  | Associated Behaviour   |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Exclusion<br/>(Involvement)<br/>and Exit<br/>Behaviour</p>  | <p>Showed staff felt excluded from the merger process with no mechanisms to vent or share their feelings.</p> <p>Illustrated a disconnection between staff and management, who believed appropriate structures were in place but did not pay enough attention to processes such as, submission timeframes.</p> | <p>Staff powerlessness led to:</p> <p>Escapism, Disengagement, Withholding of effort, Defiance, Exiting the organisation e.g. voluntary redundancy</p>   |
| <p>Language</p>    | <p>Revealed deeper meanings and how the person felt about what they were saying.</p> <p>Uncovered that the merger was a battle, and felt like being in a war-zone.</p> <p>Unmasked negative emotion towards the merger that was concealed in humour used as a merger prop.</p>                                 | <p>A language of change rife with war, battles, violence, and strategy was adopted.</p> <p>A them/us (staff/management) position occurred.</p> <p>The merger process and characters were unflatteringly re-named.</p> <p>Props were created e.g. Stir Wars, which expressed negative staff feelings such as, hurt, nonchalance, anxiousness.</p> |
| <p>Emotion</p>   | <p>Portrayed the intensity of feeling during the merger process.</p> <p>Acted as a lens to process meaning and heightened the organisational atmosphere.</p>   | <p>Manifested in behaviour both in- and out- side of the workplace.</p> <p>Symptoms included: misplaced anger, drinking, yelling, and withdrawal.</p> <p>Affected the individual, their colleagues, and their wider social network.</p>  |
| <p>Meaning</p>   | <p>Divulged that recipients of the merger attributed different meanings than those in charge of the merger. For example, management felt disestablishment was an opportunity to do something new but staff felt it was a personal rejection.</p>   | <p>Increased workloads led to tired management and staff.</p> <p>Some staff perceived the merger as an opportunity; others mourned the loss of jobs, colleagues, and institutional identity.</p> <p>Attributed merger meanings impacted relationships, self-confidence, moods, career, and provoked self-assessment.</p>                         |

#### 6.4 *Merger Communication Processes*

An important aspect of social dynamics involved participants electing to use their voice to influence change, thereby investing the time and effort to communicate. As Hirschman (1970) suggested, voice is an effort to change a dissatisfying situation through individual or collective means of appealing to management or a higher authority such as, the Government in this situation, or through defiant acts to rally public opinion.

In this merger the language of change, re-naming of people and processes, employing humour as a prop, and the Christmas lunch skit, were all social means of communicating staff reactions to change. The language of war, violence, and strategy, exposed that the merger was a battle and participants felt like they were in a war zone. Staff and management felt they had to fight for their view, creating a division and an entrenched them/us position. The battle was fuelled by i) perceived dishonesty, visible in the re-naming of the process from merger to takeover, and ii) by staff exclusion, evident in the re-naming of a lead merger character to Fuhrer, which signalled the perception of a dictatorship rather than inclusive process. Referring to the change process as a merger rather than takeover reminds me of this quote “like light, truth dazzles. Untruth, on the other hand, is a beautiful dusk that enhances everything” (Camus, 2006, p. xiii). The use of the term merger may have been an attempt by management to enhance the situation but it set expectations that the change process was unable to meet such as, the best staff from both organisations would be selected for positions when in reality mostly CCE staff were disestablished. The adoption of war language indicated a takeover situation (rather than a merger), which as predicted by Mirvis (1985) bought a battlefield mentality.

Hirschman (1970), in his discussion of economic mechanisms for declining firms, proposed that using voice to express a view is a political but worthwhile pursuit characteristic of a democratic society like New Zealand. In this merger situation, voice rather than exit may have been the only reasonable means to influence change. For although exiting the organisation before a disestablishment date would be inconvenient, it is unlikely to exert enough pressure to see a resultant improvement in the process. This is because management have already indicated they wish to see a decline in

organisational membership by disestablishing positions. In other mergers, exit is a real concern, for an organisation's value can diminish when key staff exit.

Another communication process used during the merger was humour. All the creative props reviewed were ineffective at masking negative underlying emotions. Yet humour itself was a useful prop to convey staff resistance to the merger. *Stir Wars* episodes I, II and III, although amusing to staff, exposed a belief that CCE would be destroyed and an anxiousness to prevent extermination. As Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) explain, humour is a resistance weapon that conveys cynicism, disillusionment, and distance between staff and management. *Stir Wars* was cynical about the merger process inching along, expressed disenchantment with a situation that left staff "desperate to survive," and suggested a divide between staff and management support of the merger by blowing up UC and CCE buildings.

The word game invented by the CCE enrolments and records team was also intended as a means to convey humour but instead revealed a sub-text of negative emotion. This game involved constructing new words from "position disestablished." Those new words communicated the hurt and frustration associated with being disestablished. The altering of two advertisements disclosed that i) the fake Tui posters were amusing while publicly challenging the CCE Council's decision to wind down the School of Business, and ii) the official merger advertisement's altered text was used to vent at senior management rather than be a successful attempt at humour.

Costumes were the most effective prop at communicating humour but they still, upon close examination, hinted at staff nonchalance and rebelliousness. And, as a means to convey humour, the roadmap cartoon was enjoyed by some but considered juvenile by others. This resulted in the prop being provocative of negative emotion rather than a tool to transmit information in a light manner. It is clear that people expressed deep emotions and views under the guise of humour therefore, if an organisation dismissed humour lightly it would miss the meanings communicated via this jocular undercurrent (Collinson, 2002).

Another attempt at humour highlighted disconnection between the meanings attributed to the merger by management and staff. This was the CCE Christmas lunch skit, which

conveyed a management member's view of the merger. Intended as a joke it not only fell flat but was misinterpreted by staff as making light of their circumstances. Instead of creating unity by laughing about the merger process this attempt at humour undermined organisational stability. This skit illustrated that management were out of touch with staff and lacked empathy, and staff responded by exiting the Christmas function. An incident that signalled the importance of considering the organisation's social climate to appreciate how behaviour is likely to be perceived, good intentions are not enough.

Embracing social communication requires a structure that includes mechanisms for change participants to share or vent their feelings, while providing management with an opportunity to understand the climate or underlying mindsets of their organisation. Such a structure would facilitate discussion of more than personal loss or gain incorporating, as advocated by Nilakant and Ramnarayan's (2006) change management model, dissemination of the change strategy so recipients can appreciate the need, consequences, and options for change, and management can mobilise support for the change.

### *6.5 Role of Emotions in the Merger Process*

Emotion is a central part of any organisational change process. In this instance, it acted as a lens when processing the meaning of merger events. Emotions were felt throughout the merger process and shared with colleagues, family, and friends. There was an intensity that provoked comparisons to war, murder, and a tsunami; supercharged the atmosphere; and influenced behaviour both in- and out- side the workplace.

Inevitably, with the disestablishment of jobs staff felt less warmly towards management as the merger progressed, which strained relationships. This impact on relationships is likely to outlive the merger period and contribute to preventing the leaders who took the institution apart from being the people able to put it back together and move the new organisation forward. During the process leaders failed to provoke positive emotion or passion for the merger. This left staff unconvinced by the rhetoric that "teacher education [should] be undertaken within a university setting in line with other professions such as, medicine, law, and engineering" (University of Canterbury, 2005),



and forced staff to rely on their own emotional responses to the events unfolding around them to make sense of the change. This reminded me of Lerner's statement that "no account of how things are can fully answer the question of what is possible" (1996, p. 330).

Underneath many emotional experiences was the threat of job and livelihood loss. For even if a participant secured another job, within UC or externally, there was still an inescapable change in routine, environment, and people. This highlighted how management and staff emotions differed. A number of management participants secured, or were offered, roles in the new structure whereas many staff positions were disestablished. Therefore, management felt less fearful about the future, less uncertainty, and more optimism. Being in charge of the merger, they also had more control over the change than staff. To appreciate how staff felt, management needed to be empathetic and recognise that disestablishment was personal for staff.

Emotions manifested in negative behaviour including misplaced anger, drinking, yelling, or withdrawal. Yet emotion also acted as a catalyst to bring staff together through an affinity based on shared experiences. When staff lacked an appropriate channel to be heard by management this contributed to their views and emotions being suppressed, which resulted in pressure-cooker incidents for example, calling management names and storming out of meetings. Staff who demonstrated anger and disillusionment in the merger process were also likely to be less committed and show less goodwill towards the institution.

Monitoring staff emotions are imperative in a merger situation. This requires management attention to social organisational aspects such as, staff feelings and atmosphere. Emotion acted as a temperature gauge for the institution, when hot the organisational atmosphere crackled with energy that led to misinterpretation and outbursts when that energy was released. Such release provides valuable information about how the merger process was perceived and if seen to be acted upon, would build trust between staff and management as staff would feel heard and more involved in the process. Yet implementation of any emotion or social monitoring plan such as, the CCE Climate Survey requires a timeframe, progress review dates, and that the information be distributed to institutional members otherwise the sincerity of the plan may be

questioned. Staff were cynical about the CCE climate review because management promised a follow-up survey in June/July 2006 to assess progress but it was never carried out. Given the radical change that occurred during the second half of 2006 it is unlikely, had the survey been undertaken, that it would have shown an improvement.

### *6.6 Meaning Making*

What the merger meant to participants was influenced by social roles. Recipients of the merger attributed different meanings than those in charge of the merger. Disestablishment of staff positions were seen as personal rejection and conveyed to staff they were not valued. Management, on the other hand, considered it an opportunity for staff to do something new. Whether disestablishment was seen as a rejection or opportunity reflected how the individual perceived: loss of job, colleagues, and institutional identity; stability of relationships; self-confidence; career impact; and outcome of self-assessment.

Delays in obtaining merger approval meant squeezed timeframes to meet a merger date of January 1, 2007. This pressure resulted in a frantic pace of change during the second half of 2006. Staff and management workloads were increased through added duties around information provision, planning, and responses to change proposals, which led to longer working weeks. This contributed to fatigue and led to inflexible timelines such as, multiple change proposal consultation periods closing within days of each other. Decisions made in this environment were perceived as suggesting individuals did not matter, that what was important was achieving the objective of accomplishing the merger, not how that goal was reached. Staff needed to be given roles to ensure what was important to them was built into the merger process such as, consistent and appropriate (to staff) change proposal submission and review timeframes. Without these staff roles the merger will be played out in a supercharged atmosphere that is rife with misinterpretation, caused by the different meanings recipients of the change (staff) and those controlling the process (management) attribute to the merger. Hence, awareness and empathy for the alternate group's viewpoint is critical to obtain commitment to the merger and a joint future.

### 6.7 *Exit Behaviour*

In merger situations, exit behaviour need not necessarily mean exit from the organisation. As evident in this study, it could also include forms of escapism, defiance, and disengagement. This study has shown exit behaviour resulted when change participants were excluded from the merger process and felt powerless. Such behaviours slow the process and reduce merger commitment yet social dynamics provide early warnings of this through emotion (outbursts, relationships strain), communication (language, humour), and the organisational atmosphere. The possibility of exit mechanisms occurring can be tempered by the perceived likelihood that member's voiced protests, when combined with other protests, will result in an improvement or by fostering institutional loyalty for when a member is loyal they will be more likely to try and influence the organisation before exiting (Hirschman, 1970).

Therefore, an effort must be made to get in touch with staff and understand how they are coping with the merger. Early warnings that allude to exit behaviour include a shift in the focus of discussions during business hours from work to topics such as, casual drinks and social activities. Management also need to pay attention to day-to-day activities to identify when effort is being withheld. This behaviour manifests in reduced working hours, increased sick leave, less time spent planning and refining lecture and support materials, fewer research outputs, and work piling up as people concentrate on making change submissions or looking for jobs, rather than focusing on their existing role.

Disengagement from this merger occurred once staff perceived it was fruitless to attempt to participate. Participants felt consultation was a farce, their opinions were ignored, and that they had no impact on the process. Colleagues also disengaged from each other to avoid being constantly reminded of their situation, which for a number of staff consisted of disestablishment and loss. Disengagement is an exit strategy that indicated staff did not buy-in to the merger and were no longer prepared to work with management. This left management with no feedback mechanism.

Exclusion also roused another form of exit behaviour, defiance. On an individual level defiance was visible in a reluctance to accept assistance from the organisation such as,

career counselling or relaxation massages. At a group level, defiance ranged from staff sharing negative views about the merger with students, to facilitating merger events becoming public. Personal defiance was an exit strategy signalling the participant no longer wished to engage with the organisation. However, acts of group defiance intended to send a signal to management or utilise voice as a mechanism to influence change by mobilising public opinion (Hirschman, 1970).

### *6.8 Indication of Processes Requiring Attention*

This study has shown social dynamics to have a further important role, which is to highlight organisational change processes that require attention. Much can be learned from language, emotion, and behaviour that participants may not directly inform management about. Such learning will avoid implementing an organisational change effort that management believes is appropriate but restricts the opportunity for staff to be involved. In an environment characterised by intense emotion and a supercharged atmosphere, participants are constantly searching for clues to make sense of the change. Therefore, change processes have to be transparent.

Consultation is an illustration of a process in this merger that required management attention. Although a structure for consultation existed with submission and review processes that were suitable for management, these were inappropriate for staff. This led to staff forming conclusions about the validity of consultation and, largely due to timelines, dismissing the possibility of anything but minor aesthetic changes occurring in change proposals. Increased attention to the consultation framework was required to ensure a consistent merger message was conveyed, that message being: staff input was valuable and as such a reasonable time for submissions would be provided, along with a reasonable time for panels to review and recommend changes.

In another example, working parties were a process that won much support early in the merger process but later attracted cynicism when these groups were perceived to have little influence. Again, attention to this merger component would have ensured working party recommendations/ideas were implemented or rigorous explanations provided as to why that was not possible. Anything less would be perceived as insincere and a waste of time for those participating.

### 6.9 *The Merger Challenge*

Mergers are radical change processes that present many challenges for management. This study suggests that to manage mergers more effectively management attention needs to be focused on process social dynamics that consist of: i) use of language, ii) expression of emotions, iii) meaning making, and iv) exit behaviour. To achieve this managers' must pay attention to communication processes including, props that convey humour and the dissemination of information; ensure these processes are inclusive; and consider how their actions and behaviour will be perceived by staff. An inclusive merger structure should provide mechanisms for staff expression and integrate roles that enable what is important to staff to be built into the process.

Further, decisions need to be transparent, and emotions need to be acknowledged and managed to minimise exit behaviour. Emotion is a legitimate part of the change process and reveals the intensity of feeling. Providing mechanisms for staff to vent or share their emotions will contribute to staff feeling heard and involved in the merger process. Emotions along with decision dissemination need to be managed in order to reduce exit behaviour, which is not limited to exiting the organisation but includes, escapism, defiance, and disengagement. Such exit behaviours occurred when staff felt excluded and powerless. Additionally, management need to appreciate the meaning employees assign to a merger as it is likely to be dissimilar to their own attributed meaning. Therefore, management need to be committed to involving employees, implementing transparent processes, and being consistent in words and deeds.

Organisational change is complex and is likely to be characterised by resistance, politics, and failure, resulting in competing narratives or viewpoints (Dawson, 2003). As Cammock (2001) observed, he had never seen a large organisational change effort initiated that did not experience significant resistance. Given that mergers are likely to be contested processes, necessary skills for managers include, how to defuse stress and tension and how to resolve conflicts. In CCE, this capability seemed to be lacking. Conflict was openly conveyed through language, humour, emotion, and contributed to a supercharged organisational atmosphere. Contentious examples of conflict from this study include the consultation process and ban of "all CCE" email use.

Yet conflict was not just limited to staff/management interactions. From an emic viewpoint the future of the School of Business was an early point of contention, resulting in entrenched positions, media involvement, and exit behaviours. During the merger process the mutual trust and confidence that should have existed between School of Business staff and senior CCE management (as employer) completely broke down. And, although it was accepted to be the employers' responsibility to fix the situation, no conflict resolution ensued. This led to a stand off between the School and CCE management and the general non-involvement of the School of Business in much of the merger. Here the lack of conflict resolution culminated in early exit behaviour and a group of disaffected staff.

In particular, effective mergers require managers to pay attention to social dynamics consisting of i) use of language, ii) expression of emotions, iii) meaning making, and iv) exit behaviour. This is achieved through inclusive communication processes, transparent decisions, and acknowledgement and management of emotion. As mergers are likely to be contested processes, managers also need to be skilled in defusing stress and tension and must know how to resolve conflicts. Management attention to social dynamics should be rewarded by minimising dysfunctional exit behaviours such as, escapism, defiance, and disengagement. The overall contribution of this study is to suggest that managing social processes is as important, if not more important, than establishing structures during a radical change in an organisation. Specifically, this study identifies elements of social processes such as involvement, meaning making, language, and emotions that managers can influence to ensure that change processes are productive, healthy, and humane.

#### *6.10 Reflective Note*

Conducting this research has been a journey encompassing the inception of a “career limiting” idea, the willingness of people to participate, the collection and analysis of participants' stories, and the writing of this thesis. Occurring alongside this research journey has been a personal one that included phases of energy and confidence, and fatigue and self-doubt (after disestablishment) that ultimately led to a new career opportunity in a different industry.

Looking back, I realise the most notable change in my perception of merger events is that when this research commenced I believed management did not want, or did not care, about putting in the effort required to manage this change process in an inclusive and positive way for staff. Yet as a result of this study, I now suspect management did care but simply did not know how to manage merger social processes. And, perhaps being a senior management team inexperienced with radical change, they focused on creating what they believed was a fair process through implementing structure. This, I believe, resulted in management effort and emphasis being on process, which was tangible, controllable, rational and predictable, rather than on the intangible, less controllable social aspects of the merger. Conversely, something that hasn't changed for me throughout this study is the idea that connecting with people rather than focusing mainly on process is a strong base for organisational change success.

And, although this study and the merger were valuable experiences that have taught me much about people and change, it is a good feeling (one reminiscent of freedom) to now be moving on.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix A: Merger Timeline*

| Date                        | Event  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>2005</b>                 |  |
| January 2005                | During the Principal's address at CCE's first staff meeting of the year (nicknamed by staff as "state of the nation"), it was announced a merger with UC was to be considered.   |
| 9 February 2005             | Christchurch College of Education (CCE) Council passed a resolution to seek a merger with a university, and that the preferred university was the University of Canterbury (UC). A suggested merger date was January 1, 2006.  |
| 23 February 2005            | The University of Canterbury Council agreed to hold formal discussions with the Christchurch College of Education about a possible merger between the two institutions.  |
| March 2005                  | CCE Council passed a resolution that the School of Business was no longer part of UC/CCE merger. Instead a School sale process was agreed by CCE Principal/ Deloitte/ TEC/TAMU.  |
| 13 April 2005               | CCE Council motion passed supporting "in principle" the proposed merger with UC, and endorsed the proposal that the merger take effect no later than January 1, 2007.  |
| 22 April 2005               | Email notification to CCE staff that a review of operations and structure was about to commence.   |
| Week commencing 15 May 2005 | CCE School of Business Information Memorandum is sent out to would be purchasers. School sale tender process commenced.  |
| 24 May 2005                 | Proposed Merger Business Case (draft 2) made available for UC and CCE staff to read on merger website. The document is confidential to UC and CCE staff members. Some sections of the Business Case were not made available due to the commercially sensitive nature of the information contained within them. |
| 27 May 2005                 | Merger Business Case version three posted on merger website for UC and CCE staff.  |
| 1 June 2005                 | UC and CCE Councils resolved to progress merger discussions, effectively approving the merger business case. This case was intended to form the basis of the document to be sent to the Minister for Tertiary Education asking for his approval for the proposed merger.                                       |
| 3 June 2005                 | Disestablishment and immediate departure of CCE Associate Principal due to the position's responsibilities being "subsumed by specialised administrative centres of the University." Advised via an "all-CCE" email 3 June 2005.   |
| 10 June 2005                | Confidential KPMG report on CCE restructuring made available to CCE Principal and SLG (CCE Strategic Leadership Group).  |
| 13 June 2005                | CCE staff advised via email that all College Schools are under review as well as the nature and size of SLG (CCE Strategic Leadership Group).  |



|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 15 June 2005                    | Closure date for indicative offers for the purchase of CCE School of Business.   |
| July 2005                       | UC expressed interest in some parts of SoB being integrated with UC Opportunity.   |
| 8 July 2005                     | Four week consultation period commences with CCE senior management regarding CCE restructure.  |
| 12 August 2005                  | CCE restructure change proposal document released to staff. This document referred to the below CCE leadership positions as disestablished with effective dates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Associate Principal (June 2005)</li> <li>- Director: Learning and Information Services (July 2005)</li> <li>- Human Resources Manager (September 2005)</li> <li>- Associate Director: School of Professional Development (December 2005)</li> <li>- Director: School of Business (dependent on sale of the School of Business, January 2006).</li> </ul> |
| 8 September 2005                | Notification that the School of Business sale process is to be closed due to a CCE Council resolution. Bidders are advised that SoB sale has been withdrawn.   |
| 8 September 2005                | CCE Council determined that the School of Business would continue to operate within CCE during 2006 or until the time of any merger with UC, while options continued to be explored.   |
| 9 September 2005                | Email notice to CCE staff requesting them to indicate to HR if considering applying for voluntary redundancy or reducing workloads for 2006 or on a permanent basis.   |
| 20 September 2005               | The proposed CCE/UC merger public consultation document was sent to the Tertiary Advisory Monitoring Unit, TAMU, (a unit within the Ministry of Education) for forwarding to the Minister for Tertiary Education.  |
| 23 September 2005               | Proposed structure for a UC College of Education (UCCE) presented to staff by the Academic Planning Group (APG) via a joint UC/CCE forum.  |
| 3 October 2005                  | CCE Restructure change proposal implementation plan published.   |
| Week commencing 3 October 2005  | Catering Department change proposal presented to staff.  |
| 14 October 2005                 | Voluntary redundancy decisions from the CCE restructure process communicated to affected individuals.  |
| 28 October 2005                 | Change proposal for the proposed integration of Marketing and Liaison Services released.   |
| 28 October 2005                 | Change proposal for the proposed integration of Library Services released.   |
| Week commencing 31 October 2005 | Submissions close for the Catering Services department change proposal regarding a restructure and the possibility of outsourcing.   |
| 16 November 2005                | CCE Council passed a resolution to wind down/close the School of Business through transitional arrangements with UC until 2008.  |

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| 21 November 2005       | Submissions close for the draft proposed academic structure for a University College of Education (UCCE).  |
| 28 November 2005       | Submissions close for the Library Services change proposal.  |
| 2 December 2005        | CCE confirmed the Catering Department would not be outsourced at this time.  |
| 5-22 December 2005     | CCE Climate Survey available online for staff to complete.   |
| 8 December 2005        | Notification of closure of ACENZ effective from 31 December 2005. ACENZ was the representative body for the Colleges of Education. This also included the closure of the Colleges of Education Accreditation Committee, CEAC.                                      |
| 9 December 2005        | Library Implementation Plan release delayed until Wednesday 14th December due to the high number of submissions on the change proposals.<br>Library staff informed of this date change on 5 December.  |
| 14 December 2005       | Library implementation plan released.  |
| December 2005          | Marketing and Liaison implementation plan released.  |
| December 2005          | A four-school academic structure for the new UCCE developed and recommended by the Academic Planning Group (APG) to the CCE Principal for discussion with the UC Vice Chancellor.  |
| 31 December 2005       | Closure of ACENZ and CEAC.   |
| <b>2006</b>            |  |
| 3 February 2006        | CCE Marketing and Liaison functions are now part of UC.  |
| 3 February 2006        | CCE campus library is now the UC Education Library.  |
| 28 February 2006       | CCE staff climate survey general report available on StaffNet (CCE staff intranet).  |
| 2 May 2006             | CCE Staff climate survey report presented to the Principal and Executive Team, with recommendations for consideration, following staff meetings about the climate survey results.  |
| Week ending 5 May 2006 | Minister for Tertiary Education announced the commencement of a period of public consultation about the proposed mergers of Christchurch College of Education with the University of Canterbury and Dunedin College of Education with Otago University.            |
| 9 June 2006            | Public submission period for proposed merger to Minister for Tertiary Education closes.  |
| June/July 2006         | A further CCE staff climate survey scheduled for June/July 2006 (CCE, Workplace Climate Survey Report, 2006) did not take place.   |
| 25 July 2006           | Change Proposal for the Integration of Financial Services released. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CCE 9 out of 11 positions disestablished and one fixed term position not renewed.</li> <li>- 4 new UC positions intended to be advertised.</li> </ul> |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Week ending 28 July 2006                             | A new look public area of the proposed merger website is launched. Coinciding with the change to a new URL, <a href="http://www.ccecanterburymerger.ac.nz/">http://www.ccecanterburymerger.ac.nz/</a> from URL: <a href="http://merger.cce.ac.nz/spaces/space.php?space_key=2">http://merger.cce.ac.nz/spaces/space.php?space_key=2</a>   |
| 31 July 2006   | Change Proposal for the Integration of Adult Education and Training Programmes released. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All 3 positions transferred to UC, which were academic staff.</li> </ul>  |
| 1 August 2006  | Change Proposal for the Integration of the School of Business Programmes released. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All positions disestablished.</li> <li>- Fixed term lecturer positions intended to be advertised.</li> </ul>  |
| 1 August 2006  | Change Proposal for the Integration and Provision of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Related Services released. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CCE 6 of 11 positions disestablished.</li> <li>- CCE 2 fixed term contract position-types not renewed (which may have affected more than 2 people).</li> <li>- CCE 2 of 9 Educational Design Team positions disestablished.</li> <li>- UC 16 of 46 positions disestablished.</li> <li>- UC 1 fixed term contract position-type of not renewed (which may have affected more than 1 person).</li> <li>- UC 0 of 11 Print &amp; Copy positions disestablished.</li> <li>- 29 new UC positions intended to be advertised.</li> </ul> |
| 4 August 2006  | Andy the CCE cat “retired” to a home in Rangiora.   |
| 7 August 2006  | Change Proposal for the Integration of Enrolments and Records Services released. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All positions disestablished.</li> <li>- 12 new UC positions intended to be advertised (3 positions 0.67 FTE, 2 positions fixed term).</li> </ul>   |
| 18 August 2006                                       | The Minister for Tertiary Education announced approval for the merger between the University of Canterbury and the Christchurch College of Education effective on January 1, 2007.  |
| 21 August 2006                                       | UC Vice Chancellor announced the appointment of Pro Vice Chancellor of the University’s College of Education (UCCE), effective January 1, 2007.   |
| 21 August 2006                                       | UC Vice Chancellor announced the appointment of the Dean of the Faculty of Education, effective January 1, 2007.  |
| Noon 21 August<br><del>Noon 4 September 2006</del> * | Enrolments and Records Services change proposal submissions close. UC Human Resources receive submissions from all interested parties.<br>*On 11 August the 4 September submission date was amended to noon 21 August.  |
| 22 August 2006                                       | Financial Services Change Proposal submissions close. UC Human Resources receive submissions from all interested parties.   |
| 25 August 2006                                       | Food services (Catering Services Department) staff informed that a change process is commencing and that an indicative timeline for releasing a change proposal will be known within two weeks.   |
| Late August 2006                                     | Advertisements celebrating the merger appear in the press throughout New Zealand.   |

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Noon 29 August 2006               | Information Communication Technology and Related Services change proposal submissions close. UC Human Resources receive submissions from all interested parties.   |
| Noon 31 August 2006               | School of Business change proposal submissions close. UC Human Resources receive submissions from all interested parties.  |
| Noon 31 August 2006               | Adult Education and Training Programmes change proposal submissions close. UC Human Resources receive submissions from all interested parties.   |
| 1 September 2006                  | Information Communication Technology and Related Services change proposal review panel makes recommendation to UC Chief Operating Officer.   |
| 4 September 2006                  | Change Proposal for the Establishment of the Staff Structure for the University of Canterbury College of Education (UCCE) released to staff. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 29.7 of 177.5 FTE* positions disestablished.</li> <li>- 28.2 new FTE positions intended to be advertised.</li> </ul> *FTE = full time equivalent |
| 7 September 2006                  | Enrolments and Records Services change proposal review panel makes recommendation to UC Chief Operating Officer.   |
| Week commencing 11 September 2006 | Enrolments and Records Services change proposal staff personally advised of outcome/status of their position and issued with copy of implementation plan.  |
| Week commencing 11 September 2006 | Enrolments and Records Services final outcome document (implementation plan) published.  |
| 11 September 2006                 | Information Communication Technology and Related Services staff personally advised of outcome/status of their position and issued with copy of implementation document.  |
| 12 September 2006                 | Information Communication Technology and Related Services final outcome document published.  |
| By 18 September 2006              | Enrolments and Records Services staff in disestablished positions to apply for new UC positions.   |
| 19 September 2006                 | Adult Education and Training Programmes change proposal review panel makes recommendation to UC Chief Operating Officer.   |
| 19 September 2006                 | School of Business Change Proposal review panel makes recommendation to UC Chief Operating Officer.  |
| Complete by 25 September 2006     | Enrolments and Records Services selection process for positions complete and staff informed of outcomes.<br>Offer made – 3 days to consider offer and accept or decline.   |
| 27 September 2006                 | Adult Education and Training Programmes change proposal staff personally advised of outcome/status of their position and issued with copy of implementation document.  |
| 27 September 2006                 | School of Business change proposal staff personally advised of their positions and issued with copy of implementation document.  |

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| 29 September 2006            | School of Business Change Proposal final outcome document published.   |
| 29 September 2006            | Adult Education and Training Programmes final outcome document published.  |
| 1 October 2006               | Adult Education and Training Programmes transition period begins.  |
| 2 October 2006               | Establishment of the Staff Structure for the University of Canterbury College of Education (UCCE) change proposal submissions close. UC Human Resources receive submissions from all interested parties. |
| 6 October 2006               | Establishment of the Staff Structure for the University of Canterbury College of Education (UCCE) review panel makes recommendation to UC Vice-Chancellor and CCE Principal.                             |
| 12-16 October 2006           | Establishment of the Staff Structure for the University of Canterbury College of Education staff personally advised of outcome/status of their position.   |
| 16 October 2006              | Establishment of the Staff Structure for the University of Canterbury College of Education (UCCE) implementation plan released.  |
| 1-19 October 2006            | School of Business transition period commences. Staff able to apply for positions.   |
| 20 October 2006              | School of Business positions selection process complete. Offer made – 3 days to consider offer and accept or decline.  |
| 17 November 2006             | Establishment of the Staff Structure for the University of Canterbury College of Education (UCCE) selection process for new positions complete.  |
| 17 November 2006             | Establishment of the Staff Structure for the University of Canterbury College of Education employment offer advised to applicable staff.   |
| 24 November 2006             | Establishment of the Staff Structure for the University of Canterbury College of Education redundancy notices distributed.   |
| Complete by 30 November 2006 | Information Communication Technology and Related Services selection process for positions completed and staff informed of outcomes. Offer made – 3 days to consider offer and accept or decline.         |
| <b>2007</b>                  |  |
| 1 January 2007               | University of Canterbury and Christchurch College of Education officially merge.   |

## *Appendix B: Interview Protocol*

Note: The protocol was amended for each interview; hence participants were not asked identical questions and did not discuss identical topics.

### **Interview Protocol**

**Opening statement:** Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. I am interested in understanding the social aspects present in the pre-merger stages of the proposed merger between UC and CCE. As this study has been approved by the University of Canterbury's Ethics Committee, I need you to complete a declaration of consent form. I acknowledge that the merger process is highly sensitive and assure you of strict confidentiality. I do want to audio-tape our discussion to aid with writing up the interviews and completeness of data. I will also be taking notes during the interview in case of any Dictaphone malfunction.

**This is participant:**

**On (date):**

**Commencing at (time):**

**Held (where):**

1. *How would you describe the merger social climate right now? [of the organisation where participant works – CCE/UC]*
2. *Consider the merger process to date, acknowledging that the CCE restructure is perceived as part of the merger process.*
  - a. *What have been the **high points** of the merger process and why?*
  - b. *What have been the **low points** of the merger process and why?*
3. *What does the merger mean to you? (Collect stories)*
4. *What do you think is most important to UC and CCE management in this merger?*
5. *What social changes have you noticed as a result of the merger?*
6. *How do you **participate in** merger communication i.e. share information or give feedback to management? [Is communication two-way?]*
7. *Can you give me some examples of merger communication you have **received** and how you felt about these? [That you were particularly happy/unhappy with?] Prompts:*
  - a. *Stir Wars DVD left in the shared staff room*
  - b. *HR weekly email activity update, roadmap & quotes*
  - c. *Ban of staff using the “all CCE” email*
  - d. *CCE Christmas party merger skit*
  - e. *Council meeting that closed SoB*
  - f. *Climate survey*

8. *What emotions have you experienced since the announcement of the proposed merger? And when or towards whom did you feel these emotions?*
9. ***What was your reaction to your School's change proposal?***
  - a. *Why did you react this way? [how did you feel]*
10. ***How was the change proposal delivered/communicated?***
  - a. *Do you think this was appropriate?*
11. *How have you coped with the merger (and the demands it has made on you)?*  
*[study, alcohol, sport]*
  - a. *What support have you utilised during the merger?*
    - i. ***Networks*** e.g. friends, co-workers, supervisor/manager, family/relatives (personal social support), peer relationships **OR**
    - ii. ***Situational support*** e.g. HR dept, counsellors, career-counsellors or career guidance
12. *Who are the winners in this merger?*
13. *Well that's all the questions I have. Do you have any other information or comments that you would like to share?*

How would you like to receive a copy of this interview transcript?

**Time interview finished:**

**Advise future actions:** After I provide you with the notes/transcript from this interview, I would appreciate it if you could review these and let me know if I have misunderstood anything. I will contact you if I need clarification on anything we have discussed.  
 Thank you for your time! Na mihi, kia koe

## *Appendix C: Interview Information Sheet*

### **Information Sheet**

**Study:** Waiting For the Inevitable: Social Processes Preceding a Merger in the New Zealand Tertiary Sector

You are invited to participate in a study investigating the social dynamics present in the proposed merger between the Christchurch College of Education (CCE) and the University of Canterbury (UC). This study seeks to understand the social aspects of the merger process from two perspectives; management implementing the merger and staff affected by the change.

This study will form the thesis component of the Master of Commerce in Management at the University of Canterbury. This research will be undertaken using a qualitative approach, consisting of interviews with management and staff, participant observation, and reflexivity. Data such as internal communications, policy and procedure documents, and media publications will also be reviewed.

#### **Interview Participants' Time Commitment**

Your participation in this study will involve one interview lasting for approximately one hour, to be held at a time and location convenient for you.

#### **Information Sensitivity**

It is acknowledged by the researcher and project supervisor that the merger process is highly sensitive. Strict confidentiality is assured. This study or data from this study may be published and/or incorporated into future studies undertaken by the researcher.

#### **Background of Proposed Merger between Christchurch College of Education and University of Canterbury**

On the 23 February 2005 the University of Canterbury and the Christchurch College of Education agreed to hold formal discussions about a possible merger between the two institutions. The decision to enter into detailed discussions followed a CCE Council resolution to seek a merger with a university partner, nominating the University of Canterbury as preferred merger partner. A business case for the proposed merger was submitted to the Minister for Education in June 2005 and revised in March 2006. The business case has not yet been approved by the Minister for Tertiary Education and the Councils of both UC and CCE have also not formally agreed to the proposed merger. Yet there has been an integration of services such as marketing and liaison, the library, and the international programmes. The proposed official merger date is January 1, 2007.

#### **Study Key Areas of Interest**

- How the two perspectives (management and staff) inform each other during the merger process and how they are separate.
- How communication impacts the merger process.
- What role emotions have in the merger.

#### **Benefits of Study**

- Utilises a rare opportunity to study the dynamics of a merger as it unfolds.
- Social dynamics pre-merger have been addressed by few studies to date.



- Provides a voice to participants from all levels of the organisation such as management, academic, and general staff.

### **Human Ethics Committee**

The University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

### **Contact Details**

If you have any questions about this research project please contact Justine Brown (the researcher) or Dr. Venkataraman Nilakant (project supervisor).

*Researcher*

Justine Brown

Phone:

Email:

*Project Supervisor*

Dr. Venkataraman Nilakant

Phone:

Email:

## *Appendix D: Field Notes Structure*

Note: Field notes section appeared at the end of each interview protocol.

### **THIS SECTION IS FOR THE RESEARCHER TO COMPLETE**

#### **Interviewer observations:**

- *Observations* e.g. symbols (cars or car parks), rituals, heroes, metaphors

#### *Objectics* [use of objects]

- *Dress – formal, casual, suit/tie?, different mgmt vs. staff?*
- *Props – photos, documents*
- *Physical location – office size and location? Windows? View? Open plan?*

#### *Proxemics* [physical distance]

- *Seating, standing?*
- *Room layout and furniture - quality, new, arranged?*
- *Leaning forward or back – communication? Formal/informal*

#### *Oculesics* [eye contact]

- *Regular or forced*

#### *Haptics* [touch]

*Other:* networks? (mgmt and staff socialise), decision making style? (autocratic/democratic/rules/consultative), top down?

#### **Reflect** [and interpret because research is a lens for life]

- *Does the interviewee trust me?*
- *What am I thinking before the interview?*
- *After the interview? Overall – what are they telling me?*
- *How did we interact?*
- *Did the interviewee acknowledge any issues/faults? E.g. ought to, should*
- *Contradictions?*
- *Integration [harmony]*
- *Differentiation [conflict]*
- *Fragmentation [ambiguity]*

#### **Research objective in this interview context**

##### *Research Objective*

To investigate social dynamics generated in the pre-merger stages of the proposed merger between the Christchurch College of Education and the University of Canterbury.

### *Appendix E: Research Memo Example*

What this participant shared - reflect/ review ideas so far.

**Exclusion** - feels less involved as the merger date comes closer. Does not feel included in the process feels sidelined in decision making process – seems there's a process for feedback (change proposal consultation) but it doesn't make people feel included.

**War** - Used war language e.g. assault (from senior management on the collegial ethos of university), battle, power, authoritarian. War words have come up before - merger feels like a battle.

**Emotion** - Emotions change as the process changes "movable feast". Participants feel differently at different times. Lot of merger upheaval e.g. moving campuses, also change to role e.g. more time in meetings when could be researching.

**Isolation** – UCCE considered a second class citizen and weaker than existing Colleges and will be on a separate campus.

**Priorities** - Participant has a sense that their organisation acts in monetary interests only - does this mean staff don't believe/agree with management before merger started?

**High points** - Scoffed at idea there may be high points - this implies difficult to think of any. This is a common theme/ occurrence of most interviews so far (perhaps with management exception? Check this). High point was a glimpse of new ways of doing things. Back at start of process seemed there was a nice clean canvas to paint on but as things get closer to merger date that canvas appears to have staining and writing on it - implies that some things seem predetermined.

**Leadership** - Doesn't believe inexperienced PVC of new UCCE will fight with long-standing academics or other PVCs to make the new vision happen. So is there a shared vision to motivate staff going forward? Believes UC is taking a hands off approach to the merger and delegating the job to CCE management – thinks UC is delegating authority (reference to power) to people who don't know UC ways.

*Appendix F: Consent Form*

**Declaration of Consent**

I consent to participate in the project, *Waiting for the Inevitable: Social Processes Preceding a Merger in the New Zealand Tertiary Sector*.

I have read and understood the information sheet provided to me concerning this research project and what will be required of me if I participate in the project.

I understand the information I provide to the researcher will be treated as confidential and that my name and position title will not be disclosed in the research.

I understand that my participation in the project is voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation and information I have provided at any time without incurring penalty.

I agree to the audio-taping of any interviews between myself and the researcher that are conducted as part of this research project.

I understand that this study forms the thesis component of the Master of Commerce in Management at the University of Canterbury. This project or data from this study may be published and/or incorporated into future studies undertaken by the researcher.

If I have any concerns about this research project I will speak to Justine Brown (researcher) or to Dr. Venkataraman Nilakant (project supervisor).

**The University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.**

*Name:*

*Signature:*

*Date:*